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HOUSTON RAP TAPES

Lance Scott Walker

Photographs by
Peter Beste

Foreword by
Willie D

Edited by
Kugelberg & Michael P. Daley

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Foreword

I can't stand writers, reporters, and so-called journalists who stick microphones in the face of people and don't know what they're talking about. That happens a lot in hip-hop, the whore of the music industry. Because it's so easy to get in—pun intended—many newcomers go for instant gratification. They would rather rape the game to get paid than to get to know it intimately and fall in love.

Fortunately for hip-hop enthusiasts and those interested in a unique narrative on H-town culture, authors Lance Scott Walker and Peter Beste aren't hip-hop rapists. They are homegrown Texans and passionate nurturers of the art seeking to feed the urban spirit of the biggest city in the South to our hungry bellies with this opalescent collection of interviews conducted between 2005 and 2012 with numerous members of the Houston rap community.

To read Al-B of the pioneering battle rap group Royal Flush recount early battle rap stories at the Rhinestone Wrangler nightclub alone is worth buying two books; one to have on hand and one as a replacement tucked away in a safe or wherever you hide your valuables. Because trust me, like a fool walking out of the bank with a money bag, you will get jacked.

When I performed in Helsinki, Finland in 2007, I had no idea that DJ Screw was so popular there and that K-Rino was selling out clubs in the UK. Thanks to the easy accessibility of the internet, many artists from Houston who may not have enjoyed mainstream success are now seeping into the consciousness of hardcore rap fans.

What's beautiful about *Rap Tapes* is that the authors speak to everyone the same way. Whether they sold one million records or one, homage is given. It's important that the writers of hip-hop history reserve a space to document Scarface, Z-Ro, and Bun B among the best to ever do it. It is equally important to magnify the talents and contributions of their predecessors Romeo Poet, Raheem, and Ricky Royal, which is thankfully achieved.

The topics in *Rap Tapes* are as diverse and incendiary as the individuals who tell them. Readers are taken on a virtual ride through some of Houston's toughest neighborhoods like Fifth Ward, Third Ward, South Park, and the Southside. Issues of gentrification, crime, healthcare, drugs, and more are discussed in detail, no sugarcoating.

Rap Tapes flows more like a bunch of fellows who haven't seen each other for ages, hanging out on the block reminiscing, rather than a calculating literary guide to Houston's history. Although the latter will get you a book deal, it is the firsthand knowledge shared by those who lived the stories and their own unique worldviews that will connect the book to an audience beyond Houston's city limits.

Poet José Saramago said, "Human vocabulary is still not capable and probably never will be of knowing, recognizing, and communicating everything that can be humanly experienced and felt." I agree, but in relation to much of the indiscreet answers and information from H-Town's rap community, *Houston Rap Tapes* bring us vicariously close.

For those who need convincing past this introduction, allow me to leave you with the immortal words of the homie Pimp C, "Y'all shoulda listened to Andre, bitch we got somethin' to say!"

Willie D

JULY 2012

Preface

In the process of compiling *Houston Rap*, the photo and oral history book to which this serves as companion, we had to leave a lot out. In fact, *most* of the material that photographer Peter Beste and I began gathering in 2004 and 2005 didn't make the cut. Peter shot thousands more photos than we could ever include, and I had to boil hour-long interviews down to a paragraph or just a few lines. The length of those quotes preserves the context for the most part, but nothing compares to the full text of the conversations.

And it's important stuff in those conversations. Plenty of Houston's rap history has been documented over the years, but even more of it only survives as unwritten stories. As Houston's landscape is further developed, and so much of its physical history is erased in favor of strip centers and condominiums, those stories work to keep that history alive. Gentrification may have rendered parts of some Houston neighborhoods unrecognizable, but the fabric of the communities who once resided there remains strong, spread out as it may be. Houston's like that.

It is an enormous city, the fourth largest in the nation and one of the fastest growing, with an infrastructure that divides it up into smaller cities that really are their own towns. The neighborhoods of Fifth Ward, Third Ward, and South Park and its surrounding Southside area are all known as the birthplace of Houston rappers, but aside from that, they really couldn't be more different. Their histories are unique, the vibe in the streets is different, and of course, so are the people.

Your city is only as big as the parts of it you allow yourself to see. These are perspectives from some of Houston's marginalized corners. In the culture, the slang and the history, you see something revealed that is inimitably Houston, but there are neighborhoods like Fifth Ward, Third Ward, and South Park in a lot of American cities. The struggles laid out here and the feelings expressed may be unique to the individuals who tell the stories, but we can all relate. Through the years-long process of making these two books — doing photo shoots and interviews at backyard barbecues, in private living rooms, leaning against cars in the Texas sun, in corners of nightclubs, out under the street lights, or through countless late night phone conversations — rap music took a backseat to the human element that opened up. The men and women interviewed here are known as rappers, producers, DJs, radio personalities and the like, and we learn Houston's history through their own, but we also learn about their passions, regrets, memories, and hopes.

There is a long history of rap music in Houston, but no nostalgia. People grow apart and move on, but the momentum of rap in Houston has never died, regardless of its popularity elsewhere. There is a family element to it that reaches across the neighborhoods. Chalk it up to the insular atmosphere of Houston, global a city as it may be. That's what makes it special. It is all at once a huge melting pot and its own planet. They may tear down a lot of buildings in Houston, but nobody forgets.

This isn't meant to be a complete look into Houston rap — more like a cross section — and the names you see here aren't all the most famous ones. But Houston's superstars had a lot of help building their communities, and some of the lesser-known characters have big stories they've just never been asked to tell. In that, we get Houston at street level. It is a city that has always had its own identity, characterized in part by its outsider status, and you see why when you hear from its artists. It's a long game in Houston, and you do it all from scratch. Mainstream attention may come and go, but the neighborhoods keep on living and breathing, and everybody sticks around. I hope these conversations shed some light on that world.

Lance Scott Walker

Houston Rap Tapes

Southside Playaz

RAPPERS MIKE-D, CLAY DOE, AND MR. 3-2

Southside Playaz were a group that formed in the late '90s and featured rappers Fat Pat, Mike-D (a.k.a. Bosshog Corleone), and Mr. 3-2 (formerly of Convicts and Blac Monks). Upon Fat Pat's death in 1998, he was replaced in the group by Clay Doe. Southside Playaz released albums in 1998 and 2000 and were an integral part of DJ Screw's Screwed Up Click. Interview conducted on Cullen Boulevard in South Park, across from Screwed Up Records & Tapes.

When did you first start out?

MIKE-D: Man, since the *beginnin'.* Day one! Michael Price! Thing about it, see... Screw didn't start the shit, you feel what I'm sayin'? It was Michael Price and Darryl Scott kicked it off and Michael Price screwed... Screw used to do his music *fast*, you feel me? We been down since the Broadway days 'cause Michael Price was like a brother to me. He was a DJ, Screw was a DJ. Snap. That's when dancin' and all that shit was in. Parties and shit. But what Michael Price would do, he would slow down the *party*. You feel what I'm sayin'? The whole party. Not doin' it for tapes and... you'd just come to the house party and the music slow and you tryin' to figure out what's goin' on, why you like this shit. And then they would be on the corner, one day they was on the corner and the batteries went dead. On Calumet. Muthafucka was playin' slow.

His tape recorder.

Yeah, and when they heard that, e'rebody was just goin' crazy like, "Man, we gotta get enough of it." You know, Michael Price got killed at a dice game by a mutual friend that he lost some money from. And since then, Screw just took it and ran with it, man. And we took it to the next level. I been there since day one. But the boldest... the boldest shit was screwed, you know? When it was just DJ Screw on a clear tape, no rappers, no nothin', you know? For real.

What was it like, the first time you went over [to Screw's] house?

Man... like a natural event. Because see... Screw used to always come to my brother's detail shop. I been knowin' him. It was just natural, know what I'm sayin'? It was always a proud moment to be amongst, you know, your peers or whatever, but we wasn't tryin' to rap. That wasn't... it wasn't the big record deal shit, you know what I'm sayin'? It was just, "Let me make a tape for my car." I go back into the '90s with the music shit with Lil' Troy, when Scarface was doin' this shit—when *he* was doin' this shit...

You go almost back to the '80s, don't you?

Yeah, '89! This dude here too, Pimp Money. This nigga here [Clay Doe], this nigga here [Mr. 3-2] ... I'm talkin' about '89, '88! You know? But goin' to Screw house, it was just about gettin' your tape done. Some kinda ways ... God has this way of workin' shit out that ... it just became a phenomenon. We still don't know how. It's still hellraisin' ... that "Hellraiser" song? That's a mixtape that's a straight flow. We walked in there ... Screw doin' a beat, and just ... start flowin' on the muthafucka [*laughs*] and before you know it, we listenin' ... me and Clay listenin' to the tape all the way to the ... when we get back the tape done made it all the way across the city, all across the country. One copy turn into 10, 10 copies turn into 20 ... just like that. Another time ... when me and [Fat] Pat and 3-2 was first doin' this thing, we start recognizing the thing we was gettin' out the tapes so we started goin' to the studio, doin' our thing. So, goin' to the studio, we ridin' around, we let one of my homeboys listen to it. I left the tape in his car. Six songs on it. "Money Over Bitches," "Turnin' Lane," "Superstar," "Young In The Game," and two other songs ... maybe "Hard To Survive" or some shit. That's some old shit. I left the tape in his car, he went right around the corner to Darryl Scott, pressed up about 20 copies, *20* copies turned into *40* copies—before the week was out that shit was 400 copies. Man, this shit was like it was meant from God. This shit is just something else. I guess that's why people be like, "Why y'all haven't done this, why y'all haven't done this?" Because we wasn't dealin' with rappers in the first place. We was just dealin' with street dudes that was just doin' music, was just goin' to make a tape.

They didn't know any different.

Didn't *care* no different! We *had* money already. It wasn't no big deal, but the shit came later and then that's when the division ... that's the ... anytime you put money in a pack of rats, it's gonna scatter. That's just how it is, you know what I'm sayin'? You get the money in the equation and everybody get dumb. Screw ... this shit is gonna be forever. What I have seen, is that this shit has changed the culture of Houston. I've seen from the time when people say the people on Suave House Records ... even Lil' Troy in his earlier days ... Street Military, the forefathers of the game ... these guys were *really* Screwed Up Click haters, you feel me? Not *haters*, but they didn't believe in it, you feel me? There was no belief in it. Shit, we didn't have belief in ourself! Let alone somebody else believin' in us. But you know, you get the, "Y'all ain't gonna make it past [highway] 288—you ain't gonna make it past 610 Loop with that music," you know what I'm sayin'? And you look at 'em all now and they have to come back and embrace the music that has influenced the culture. This whole *generation*. People *talkin'* like Fat Pat now. People raise the roof all around the world like Fat Pat did when he rode with Corey Blount down the street in that car, you know what I'm sayin'? And that shit has influenced a whole *lotta* shit, man and I just want it to continue and grow, bein' the next generation—let them be young entrepreneurs like we were, and find somethin' to learn from our mistakes and capitalize, because there's no way that every individual in the Screwed Up Click or has somethin' to do with the Screwed Up Click shouldn't be millionaires. Not to say it ain't comin', but we should already be there. That's our own mistakes.

Where do you think it's going? I mean, you've seen the culture of Houston change, you've seen the rap landscape of Houston change just over the past couple of years ...

Yeah! It's changin' now! The youth involved. They gangbangin' now. You know? I'm watchin' it change and evolve into the gangbangin' ... shit don't do nothing but go in a circle. The same shit we doin', our fathers' fathers were doin', you feel what I'm sayin'? All they doin' now is goin' back to the ... stick together, without the black pride, without the gang shit. I'm sayin' this shit, though ... people tryin' to get together because of the economy and certain drugs ain't on the streets no more. It's not like how it used to be in the '80s. You can't just walk out no more and fuckin' ... make $4,000, $5,000 on the block no mo'. So they turn it to this gang shit, and that's where I'm seein' the change. I don't know if that's for the good or for the bad, but there's some good in everything and there's some bad in everything. I just hope they find something. And stick with it. And fuckin' capitalize off this shit.

Seems like even the young kids that come up here understand the work ethic that's gotta go into it.

Yeah. Exactly. It's a grind ... you got to.

That's never gonna change.

That's never gonna change. The struggle got to come before any success, you understand? If they want to jump in the game and be Lil' Keke ... shit, Lil' Keke ... it took him 10, 15 years before he got himself to his status he is now. He had to deal with it, too. If we'd have known 10, 15 years ago, we'd be in a whole different position now. We had to go the hard way to learn.

You become a different person through it—how different do you see things now from when you started?

I didn't really see too much too different, I just woulda been more ... I wasn't *serious.* I *knew* what to do—me and Pat, I was the first person to have Fat Pat on ... but we were *friends,* so it didn't matter. When he came and D-Red wanted to do a solo album, I'd do it. Because we'll be right back to doin' Southside Playaz. If it's a move that's better for you, that's okay. Actual contract. I knew what the fuck to do because my big brother BAM ... BAM's Auto and Detailing, he always gave me the *intellect* part of this game, you feel what I'm saying? To have sense with spendin' your money. I was spendin' my money in the studio, buyin' these beats, doin' this here ... man, get your paperwork done. We knew what to do, we was just like ... when the tape come up missin' incident. Instead of us takin' that publicity and *droppin'* the album, we take it and try and you know, hold it and not really knowin' what you're doin', scared to release it ... you know, I wouldn'ta been as *scary* as I was back then. I know right now me and Clay came to form LafTex Records—we knew what we was doin', but we *didn't* know what we was doin'. Experience was our teacher. So, there's no way around that. The young generation gonna have to put in they work, man, you know what I'm sayin'? And we're doin' a hell of a lot for 'em right now. We've laid some bricks, because there was a time when a Houston rapper couldn't get heard in a damn juke joint, let alone a coliseum. Oh yeah. For real. Street Military is some of the hardest individuals, let alone as a group *in* the rap game, and they wasn't getting they respect due. They was sellin' 10,000, 15,000 bullshit records, you know what I'm sayin'? When they shoulda been sellin' *millions.*

They really were ahead of their time.

Yeah, Street Military was ahead of they time. That's who gave us the *rap* part of it. Street Military, like Z-Ro say, The South Park Coalition is our fathers. That's the beginning of us, but we had to deal with them same niggas *hatin'* when we was tryin' to get in the game, too.

That's part of the game, though, isn't it?

Yeah it is! Nobody wanna see the young bull come and take over. You know? That's just *life.* Nobody wanna see that. But, that's where the shit gotta change right now. The young ... y'all been all, "I'ma come down, I'ma come through," in your rap, but you gonna have to find *you,* and then let us co-sign that and then that's gonna be okay.

CLAY DOE: Street niggas, real niggas ...

MIKE-D: There's dudes that got in the industry pretendin' to be street.

CLAY DOE: Street cats know the laws of the street. They know you can't just slide up ...

MIKE-D: Without acknowledgin' the muthafuckas who blazed that path.

CLAY DOE: If you're a street cat, you know how to maneuver in the streets. Some of these dudes ain't street cats 'cause they don't know how to maneuver in the streets. And they know if you put some real street cats on, they gonna roll they ass over and that's just all there is to it. So muthafuckas don't wanna see they shine get whooped. Now, don't get me wrong—there's some muthafuckas look out, like some of them South

Park Coalition and fuckin' Kay-K, Lil' Flea. Some of them muthafuckas looked out for us.

MIKE-D: Street Military! They came back when we was startin' to get on ... Southside Playaz—they *knew* what it was. There was no stoppin' the bowlin' ball anyway. We was mo' than honored to have the niggas on there but they was so proud that they *ran* to the opportunity to come and get on it.

CLAY DOE: They knew street movement, and they was street niggas knowin' the street movement.

You can't learn it in reverse.

CLAY DOE: You can't *learn* that shit in reverse. There's muthafuckas tryin' to be gangstas *after* they became rappers. You can't *do* shit like that. If you's a gangsta, you can turn a rapper but you can't be a rapper, and turn a gangsta. Because if you dig, muthafuckas gonna be touchin' your ass on the street like a bunch of these rappers be gettin' dunked. 'Cause the muthafuckas that's turned rappers, they done got an image behind 'em and a coupla million, and now all the sudden they dressed up in costume tryin' to be gangsta. That shit is weak, and real street niggas can recognize that off the top. And that's for real. The Southside Playaz, Mike-D, 3-2—we street *cats.* I met Mike-D in the streets. That muthafucka happened to rap and I just happened to fuck around with rap. I wanted to be a CEO, he wanted to be a rapper and a CEO, that's how we just end up fuckin' around with each other. But that muthafucka knew me from doin' shit in the streets, and was askin', "What the fuck is he doin'?" And vice versa. And we end up linkin' like that. Some of these cats, man, they groups put together by the executives or the PR people ... that shit ain't gonna work with straight down day one niggas. We down day one niggas. In the street, if we didn't make one rap or we ain't write one *line,* we still was gonna be every day linked together, you know what I'm sayin'? And that's why all these years, we still fuckin' with each other.

When was it that you met Mike-D?

CLAY DOE: Shit, man I couldn't even tell you. Maybe ... all I know is probably it was before '95. It mighta been '94, '93, but we met through a mutual friend of ours. And we end up just kickin' and shit or whatever, you know what I'm sayin'? And both of us was young dudes ... you know, young bosses in the hood. Third Ward. He heard I was certified in the hood. I heard he was certified in the hood. We was leery about fuckin' with each other 'cause that's how street cats is. But eventually we end up linkin' up and next thing you know we every day fuckin' with each other. 'Cause I recognize him bein' a real cat, he recognize. So then I end up meetin' cats like 3-2 through him, I end up meetin' Pimp Money through him, Fat Pat through him. But I already knew people like Big Moe, Pokey, and Screw. So we end up just fuckin' with each other 'cause we was all just associatin' with the same people. So eventually that was gonna happen anyway.

What's a memory that you have of Screw?

CLAY DOE: Man ... Screw. I met Screw through a potnah of mine and his. They used to live together way back in middle school or whatever. We didn't even know that Screw was Screw, you know. He didn't even know that Screw was *Screw.* But we end up meetin' him one day. We was all together in a meetin', we got to kickin' it, he got to kickin' it with me. Screw got to noticin' that everybody was ... everybody knew me and a few people knew me from Third Ward, like all the SUC, Third Ward people. And then I was tellin' him that I wanted to, you know, be an executive in the rap industry. So he start givin' me pointers, publishin' pointers, lettin' me know what points was. So eventually he was seein' I was serious with it, so eventually he just wanted me around him so he just start pullin' me in every time I go over maybe just to get a tape. He would sit me down, lock me in the house and wouldn't let me leave. And that's how we end up havin' a friendship. He was always just serious about it, and I was just like a pupil. I was his pupil. If he knew that you was serious about it, he was gonna give you all the information he had, whereas a bunch of bullshit muthafuckas keep it for theyself.

MIKE-D: For free!

CLAY DOE: He kept 100 off the top so that he saw I was serious about it and he brought me in, he taught me stuff, and then every opportunity he had to work with me, he worked with me. And then Fat Pat and Mike-D, just every time they wanted to come in Screw house, they got to come in Screw house, so I'm ridin' with them and eventually I'm in Screw house every day. But we street cats runnin' in and outta Screw house, know what I'm sayin'? He wanted us to stay still, we runnin' in and out his house, bein' street cats. He kinda had a love for us like that, for the fact that he was tryin' to look out for his little brothers. He was tryin' to show us.

MIKE-D: And people say like … even I be mad at him sometimes, I be like, "Man, we'd be so far if we'd just been mo' *business*," but that wasn't him. It wasn't about that with him. He wanted to show *you* another way so *you* can do it. *You* do it! You can do it! I got your radio … he got a *radio* station right here. This is a fuckin' radio station right here: *97.9 Screw … The Box.* Any time you drop a tape it's like a fuckin' Monday night, you feel me? On the radio. Friday night on the radio, man. There was no better way to promote than the way he had it.

It was like a broadcast.

MIKE-D: It was a *broadcast.* It's just like FM radio is now, or underground radio like that, that's how Screw shit was. I tell you what … you ask C-Note who showed him what to do. Ask C-Note who showed him what to do. When I seen C-Note do it?! We seen C-Note?! I was like *we fittin' to do this shit!*

3-2: I just got him down live at five with it. Kickin' it, havin' fun, makin' a CD. You know what I'm sayin'? Getting down behind the gates. After hours.

How long would you guys stay in for a session?

3-2: We'd stay all night. 'Til the break of dawn. Then sometimes up through the mornin'.

MIKE-D: You gotta remember back then when beepers and shit … there wasn't cell phones and all that shit. Toward the end we had cell phones and shit.

So you could get lost in there.

MIKE-D: You keep a roll of quarters in your pocket. So you get locked in that house, you *in* that bitch. There ain't no goin' out … if you leave, he be lookin' at you like, "Where you goin', muthafucka?" You don't just fuck with … you gotta be somebody. You gotta be a Clay Doe or a Mike-D, 3-2. You gotta be somebody that's *somebody* to run in and out this door. If you bullshittin', you fittin' to get out there …

3-2: Bullshit niggas get kicked to the wayside …

So he would lock you all in?

MIKE-D: He fuck with street cats and he ain't want cats runnin' in and out his house. He was straight like that.

3-2: Write your list down, all the songs you wantin' … and you kick it with Screw all night long 'til the break of dawn 'til the mornin' come. Get your tape made. Then you move around, go get you some breakfast and lay down …

Get up and make another tape.

3-2: Make another tape next week, next month. Same ol' thang. Pretty much. To sum it up. Sum it up.

CLAY DOE: A lot of the muthafuckas you talk to don't know half the story. They gonna know how shit is but they don't know *why* shit is. We could tell you everything.

When did you get started? It was in the '80s, right? Convicts was early '90s, but …

3-2: It was like '88 … I think it was '86.

What were you listening to back then?

3-2: EPMD, Rakim, KRS-One, Big Daddy Kane. Ghetto Boys, Raheem, Royal Flush and uh … other groups that Rap-A-Lot made.

That would have been the original Ghetto Boys, too, with Raheem?

3-2: Raheem. *The Vigilante.* Ready Red.

Jukebox.

Jukebox … Ready Red.

What were the Ghetto Boys like live when you saw them back then?

3-2: They played at the Rhinestone Wrangler.

What was that like?

3-2: Rhinestone Wrangler? That was the club. Where everybody performed.

What do you remember about it, when you would go in there?

3-2: Me and Scarface, know what I'm sayin'...

He was Akshen back then right?

3-2: DJ Akshen. We used to go to the club, kick it all night long. We was really lookin' up to them guys. Lookin' up to them guys.

What's your memory of Face from that era?

3-2: Me and Face grew up together. Briargate. Missouri City. We used to play with lil' race cars. Drive dirt bikes. Mongooses and dirt bikes.

Did you start rapping together?

3-2: We started rappin' then, havin' battles at Willowridge, know what I'm sayin'. Had battles at Willowridge. I was skippin' school. That's when I first got in the Convicts, me and Big Mike. Me and Big Mike made the Convicts album here in Houston, then we moved to California. Went out there to Death Row.

You were working on a deal with them, weren't you?

3-2: Yeah. We was messin' with Dr. Dre and Suge Knight. We never put the album out. We came back to Houston, I did the Blac Monks... Awol, Da. *Secrets Of The Hidden Temple.*

So what happened to the Convicts at that point?

3-2: We broke up and I did my solo project. 1995. Did a video, "Comin' Down."

'95?

3-2: Yeah '95, '96. Later on I got off Rap-A-Lot and got with the South[side]—Screwed Up Click, DJ Screw.

So what did you think about those guys when they came around? You had already been around a while.

3-2: I met DJ Screw at Club Boomerang. Tony Randall and Victor Bass. Victor Bass was our manager in the Blac Monks. Victor Bass took us to Boomerang to hear DJ Screw, Robert Davis.

He was spinning?

3-2: Yeah he was spinnin'. He was supposed to be our DJ, but he was real busy doin' work in the clubs so we end up pickin' DJ Aggravated, of the Convicts. He's still workin' at 97.9 to this day. DJ Aggravated. That was our DJ.

Same guy.

3-2: And I had—William Ross was my DJ in high school. Def Jam Blaster. He also works at 97.9, know what I'm sayin'. Good guy.

So when did you start working with those guys, like Screw?

3-2: Like Screw? I really met Screw say, like in... I wanna say '90. Right over here at Boomerang. Cullen.

He was already spinning out then?

3-2: Yeah. He had a flat top then.

Boomerang was open like '90 to '92, right? DJ Chill was out there.

3-2: Yeah, yeah. We was doin' the Convicts album, we went on the road from here all the way up to the Midwest doin' promotional shows.

How did those go? Did you prefer playing in Houston?

3-2: Went very well. You know, you blow up on the road and then you come back to Houston, to H-Town. Do it up on the road first.

(2006)

Shorty Mac

RAPPER · SMITHVILLE, TX

One of DJ Screw's oldest friends, Shorty Mac is emblematic of the juggernaut that was the Screwed Up Click. He moved on from hustling to become Screw's tape distributor in Austin—a second home to the Screwed Up Click starting in the mid-'90s and remaining so today.

So are you from Austin or from Houston?

Well, me and Screw grew up together in Smithville. He moved to Houston, and then after I got out of school I moved to Austin, and then I moved to Houston with Screw, maybe two, three years before he died. Probably like a year after he died I moved to Austin.

Did you appear on a lot of his tapes?

A few of them. I was on *Austin 2 Houston Pt. II, The Final Chapter, Off The Head, Playaz Nite, G Love, Only The Real.* Some I'm on, I don't even know the name of them. I never heard them after I rapped on them.

All the sessions you did were in Houston?

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Did you live with Screw?

Yeah, when I moved down there, I lived with Screw. I was actually just... he wanted me to come down there and it was me, him, Al-D—this was after he was on Greenstone. He was leaving Greenstone and going to the Southwest side. Mo City. And I just stayed there and then after I got there I started workin' in the shop. Helpin' him in the shop. So I was working in the shop 'til like maybe 2001, and then I moved back to Austin. All the Screw tapes we ever done was in Houston, and the majority of them was done on Greenstone. We had a few that we did... at the new house, well, you know, it was just a different thing, a different situation, always going to court behind his music. They was after him in Mo City.

He was in trouble for using other people's tracks on his mixtapes?

Nah, nah, nah. It was this lady next door—she kept calling the police on him, saying different stuff about us, saying we was harassing her kids and all this different kind of funny stuff. Then when the kids' mama go to work, they'll come knock on the door and tell us that they were sorry, and Screw used to give 'em CDs and stuff, and they used to tell him that they loved his music and all this. It was all just one little situation.

He also got into a lot of trouble at the old house, right?

Well, they kicked his door in 'cause they thought he was sellin' drugs. And he was just selling music. But that's the only—I mean, as far as police coming in and harassing him or whatever, that was the only main time. We was in a lot of situations where they would pull up and take pictures of us and all kind of shit like that, but just... when they kicked his door in, that's the only time they really came in there trippin' like that. That I *seen*. Or was closer to. You know, you may have had people leave his house and get pulled over. Or something like that. 'Cause they tryin' to figure out what he doing.

Papa Screw told me that that happened at least two or three times, that someone kicked the door in, and that each time, they'd search the house and they wouldn't find anything and then they'd just leave. They just thought something was going on.

I only know about the one time. That was when he was on Greenstone, but as far as I know, I remember the one time because of the way they done the house. They tore the gate off, the front gate—I don't know if the house is still the same—they had a gate like, by the front door, like burglar bar gates. They tore that gate off, and they knocked the front door down and came on in. And then they messed up a couple of his tapes, too. They crushed maybe about 40 or 50 tapes. Because they was pissed off. Wasn't no drugs in there. It was records and tapes.

Were you in there?

Naw, I wasn't there when they kicked the door in. I was actually in Austin. Because like he had... me and his deal was, I mean, we grew up together, so I seen... I just seen a lot from the start because me and him started rappin' together. When they *did* kick his door in, he called me and told me what was goin' on, 'cause he'd actually just set me up in Austin to start sellin' music and shit because, you know, the life that I was livin' at that time, you know... he just didn't wanna see me doin' it no more. So he started givin' me boxes of tapes to come to Austin and sell, and I think maybe... I think we started in like '94. By the middle of '95, I would come to Houston every two days, pickin' up boxes of tapes, bringing 'em back down here to Austin to sell 'em and shit. It just jumped off that quick! I mean, you know, ain't nobody really on the music except me and the people I hang around. I think when I first brought a Screw tape *to* Austin was in like '92. And it was called *3 'N Da Mornin'*, and everybody used to think that my tape deck was messed up. I used to tell 'em, "Naw, that's the way the tape goes!" So then I put some music in my car, and I used to just ride around and bump these tapes and I would go see him, and every time I would go up there he would give me a different tape to listen to. But, then it eventually... he eventually got me to start sellin' tapes, too. I was out here hustlin', so he kept tellin' me, "Man, the only thing you gonna do is do time if you keep doin' what you doin'."

How did the people in Austin react to it? You lived in Houston for a while and so you understand the environment in Houston and how the weather and the way the city moves is really reflected in Screw's music. Did people in Austin pick up on that?

Yeah. And it actually... it kinda changed the pace of Austin, because Austin was on kind of a different pace. They was like... for instance, there was a lot of dudes down here ridin' Daytons, you know, but in Houston, they main thing was ridin' swangers. So, once I came with it, I had to deal with... really like *gangs*. You had to deal with that shit, and there was some people that... listenin' to music, say, "Well, this is a Crip," or, "This is a Blood on this tape," so I switched tapes with them. Then, you tell me something you wanna hear, I call Screw, I say, "Okay, I'm dealin' with this type of crowd. They wanna hear this." So I come back with what they wanna hear, and then it went from there to them hearin' the freestylin', and when they start hearin' the whole combination together, I'd say it took it less than a year before... I was sellin'—you're literally *sellin' out*. I could go to a club on a Friday night with over 100, 200 tapes, and I won't have one tape in my pocket by the time I leave the parking lot. That's how serious it got.

The clubs in Austin back then—they couldn't have been as big as the ones in Houston, right?

Nah, nah, nah. But see, I just had a different area to deal with. I was dealin' with Austin and the little country towns around here, and then there's people comin' through Austin, like maybe be from Killeen and just different little areas around here. Everybody just got connected on there, and it got to be kind of the same thing for me, because every time you look up at my house, you seen a whole bunch of fixed up cars at my house with people comin' to get these CDs. And all these tapes—they was tapes then—they comin' to get these tapes. So they was like ... people used to tell me all the time, man, "If the law pass by here, they think you sellin' drugs, anytime there's slabs over here."

Blocks of them.

Yeah, yeah, and I even had ... I came from Houston one night, and I walked up to my door and there was a cell phone in a box sittin' at my door. And I picked it up, took it in the house, plugged it in and it was *on.* So I put it back in the box and put it outside because it scared me at that time. Because I know—it was right ... it may have been right before Screw got his door kicked in or right after he got his door kicked in, so it just scared me, and I called him and I told him, I said, "Man there's a cell phone at my door, and it's already on. I ain't order no cell phones." And he said, "Man, it might be them people." And then, I was ... at that time, me and my sister was stayin' together, with her kid, and she said—when I had went to Houston and came back and she said some agents came by the house askin' questions and they went to all the neighbors askin' questions. But all the neighbors knew I wasn't doin' nothing but sellin' music, so, I mean ... that never got *our* door kicked in or nothin'. They was just tryin' to figure out, I guess, what was goin' on because of all the activity that was goin' on in the neighborhood.

And that was in Austin.

Yeah, this was in Austin. Yeah, it got serious—when Screw had his first concert in Austin, after ... I wanna say ... it wasn't *All Screwed Up* ... it may have been *3 'N The Mornin',* 'cause Keke and Big Moe and I wanna say Point Blank was with him, and we was pullin' up to the club, we got out at the club and all these cars start comin' down the street, bangin' Screw. And Keke turned around and said, "Screw! They jammin' you in Austin like this!" And me and Screw looked at each other and started laughin'. I mean ... didn't nobody know ... I guess they didn't know I was down here sellin' tapes, and just trying to push the issue, tryin' to ... I don't know, I just ... once I started doin' it, I just got into it, and it was just like a job to me.

And people were into it.

Yeah, yeah.

So tell me this, because you grew up in Smithville with Screw, you lived in Austin, you lived in Houston for a little while and then you went back to Austin. When you got to Houston, what was your impression of Houston when you got to it, even aside from talking about what went down with Screw's persona there, what was your impression of Houston when you got there?

Well ... really, the only part I ... I used to come to Houston, but the only part I really *knew* of Houston, after I started coming down there just hanging out with Screw, was Screw's part of it. And I mean ... like now I feel a little different about Houston than I did back then, but it was just like ... it seemed like there wasn't nothin' but love everywhere. I guess it's just ... I wanna say it's the way ... the type of person Screw was, because he had different neighborhoods hangin' out with each other that didn't like each other, and I just thought, I said, "This is cool." I really thought it was *cool.* But now that he not here, it just don't seem the same to me no more, you know? Like I go to Houston, I'll go see Al-D ... you know, I don't stay in Houston too long no more. I don't get the same feelin' about Houston, because I know from back then that it's some good people around and there's some people that ain't too friendly around there, so you just gotta watch out who you deal with, man, when you're in Houston. But like Al, I know he a good person, so I know ain't nothin' gonna happen to me when I go see him or whoever he with. I know everything gonna be all good.

So what was the first year that you went to Houston? Do you remember?

When I first went to Houston was '91.

This was to see Screw?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. He actually... it was like my senior year in high school, and for some reason his sister drove up to the school... his sister came up to the school to tell me that Screw wanted me to come to Houston to see him. It was like almost graduation time. Yeah, I think it was like September of '90, '91... and I drove to Houston, like when I got out of school, and me and him sat around and we made a little tape, we hung out, like all day long, and then when I was leaving, he handed me—it had to be '91, because he handed me *3 'N Da Mornin'*—the first tape he slowed down, and he mixed it with four turntables.

So the original 3 'N Da Mornin' *was in '91?*

Yeah, that was '91, and he told me to listen to this tape and tell him what I thought. So I said the first thing that everybody else said on my way back! I'm listenin' to the tape and I kept takin' it out, putting it back in, and I called him, and I said, "Hey, man—I think you gave me a messed up tape," and he started laughin'. He say, "Naw, it's supposed to sound like that." I said, "Okay," and I just let it play. Then I say, "Okay, yeah! Okay!" All these different songs coming in, and him mixing—yeah! So I called him back after I got to Austin, and I said, "Yeah, that motherfucker jammin'!" He say, "Yeah, appreciate it." And that's when he told me right then... I don't know, he just had something in his eye, he said, "Man, we got us a way out." And I said, "Okay," but at the same time, I was still doin' what I was doin', so I would just go up there every other weekend and stay three, four days and... at one point in time, it was like I was hustlin' just to go to Houston so I could jump in the mix or... a lot of times—I done been to Screw house so many times, a lot of times, I would just come just to kick it. It wasn't about makin' no tape, it wasn't about goin' to no studio, it wasn't about none of that, because we was always best friends before everything really jumped off. Before the music jumped off, all this, I would go up there, ride up there, we'd just go to the movies. Or we'll go somewhere and chill, go play pool. But then a lot of times I would be in there when he *makin'* tapes, and wouldn't be on them. Because if he said something like, "Man, just chill and just pay attention," I know that means *whoever fittin' to come in and make this tape, keep your eye on them, 'cause I don't really know 'em like that.* So, a lot of times, you know, that may have been my position or what I was doin' at that time, payin' attention to see... make sure that don't nobody get out of line. Or something like that, you know. Not like I'm just the biggest dude in the world, but at the same time, we all grew up together, so we was all gonna stick together.

He knows that you know how to feel out a situation.

Yeah, yeah. And you know... but he would let me know who he felt that was cool or who he felt like... 'cause I was from Austin, so even though somebody would tell me, "Okay, this your potnah from Austin," and then they'll say, "Come ride with me to the store, come ride with me here," and he would give me a look to tell me, "Naw, don't ride with this dude," or, you know, "It's cool." So it was pretty picked out, who he would pick and choose to deal with. People who he really, really felt in his heart was good people, he would let me know who they was. Or people just comin' in to make a tape and just... he would let me know who they are, too. He was the *same* with everybody, though. He wasn't no different with me, Al, or anybody else. He was that same person. He didn't change or act a different way in front of nobody. He was the same person at all times.

But what I understand is that a lot of times people would get around him and he would affect the way that people would act. Like people would be really, really cool around him, people maybe who might have had some beef with each other... dudes like that would get around Screw and all of the sudden they were really cool.

Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! That's true! I mean, there was just something about him that had—he had that in him, to do that. And I think... I wanna say he... I don't know if I'm saying it right. You might have to ask Al, but like when he really just jumped in the mix, the crime rate in Houston dropped like 20 percent.

Yeah, somebody said that to me one time. They say the crime rate around Screw dropped like 20 percent.

Yeah! So that was … that was kind of big, and I seen … I don't know. I guess it was just him, though, because he never really had no problems at his house or his studio. He didn't have no problems with people. If they didn't like each other, they didn't *act* like they didn't like each other. They was cool with each other that night.

I was talking to Al-D about this. I said, "So nobody ever messed with Screw, huh?" And he said, "Man, if you did, where would you go? Do you think you could ever actually get around Houston? So many people had that guy's back, where would you go afterwards, if you messed with Screw?"

He right. I remember *3 'N The Mornin'* dropped … back then I had a slab, and I came to Houston, and we was goin' to I think the album release party or something. We pulled up in this neighborhood, and I think about 30 dudes walked up to the car. [Screw] said, "Hey man, this my kinfolk Shorty Mac. He from Austin." Them dudes looked at me and told him, "Okay, he good. Ain't nobody gonna mess with him around here." And I was just sittin' in the car and I was just trippin'. I was like, "Damn! It's like that?" But you know, I really … I knew Screw had some power, but I didn't know how big his power was until after he died. That's when I just started seein' like a lot of stuff. I said, "Man, this dude was like… he was serious." He was serious, man. That dude had power like … I don't know. I can't even put a name on it, but I just start seein' different stuff, how the reaction of people … the people and different people comin' around. And I mean, you seein' gangstas cry and I say, "Man, this dude was very effective on people's lives, man!" And not even that—this dude *changed* a lot of people's lives. By listenin' to his tapes. I mean, I done seen dudes come up there that's been hustlin' and they goin', "Man, I'm fittin' to go to college …" and like, "Man, I'm listenin' to this tape, man, Screw you got me thinkin' …" I'm like, "Wow, this is serious." But Al is right, man. if you was to do somethin', or try to do somethin' to this man, you not gonna get away with it. It was just … he had that much love for him, because he was a respectful dude, so he ain't never disrespect nobody. He was a humble dude, he showed a lot of love, so I mean, you know, that's what he really got back. I ain't gonna say now, people didn't hate him, because there may have been a lot of people hated him, but there wasn't nothin' they could do about it.

So how would you describe the energy that was going on in Houston at that point? You were sort of an outsider because you didn't grow up in Houston but you knew some of these prime characters who really helped to create it—like if you had to go back to Austin and say, "Hey, man—you know what's going on in Houston is …" what? What would you tell them?

Well … I don't know because they didn't treat me like that. Especially the people in the Click, you know? They didn't treat me like I was an outsider. It was like a … it was different, because they treated me like I was like some kind of star or something in Houston.

Yeah?

I was doin' music with Al, and I had jumped on a couple of Al's albums, and I was with Screw, doin' Screw tapes, but I mean … I was like … I guess I was like the speaker of the house for Austin. I was comin' down here lettin' 'em know everything that was goin' on, and whatever I said, "Man, you need to get this—it's fittin' to come out," everybody was jumpin' on it. And then, after so long, I didn't have to tell 'em nothin'! Because albums was steady droppin', and they knew these people was who was with Screw. After a while, it just went on affiliation. If you in the Click, and you done a song with somebody, then they gonna get that song, because there's somebody from the Screwed Up Click on there or somebody … Wreckshop or whatever. So I mean, it was just … it wasn't *hard*, really. It wasn't hard to come back to Austin and say, "Man, this dude here is jammin'," because a lot of the dudes, they had already heard 'em on Screw tapes.

So they already had reference points for a lot of stuff … they knew who Lil' Keke was and you can say, "Okay, man, there's this guy Big Pokey … you gotta hear *this guy. He did a track with Lil' Keke," and it just kind of passes on that way, huh?*

Yeah, yeah. Like ... Austin is like a second home for the Screwed Up Click. They still come down here and still get a lot of love. You say somebody from the Screwed Up Click comin' to Austin, and it'll be people that ain't came out in two years come out because these cats are comin' down here. It's just like a second home for 'em, man, and a lot of 'em will say that. I know E.S.G.—E.S.G.'ll call me, let me know when he havin' a concert down here and we'll kick it. I don't know, man ... it's *amazing*, because I never thought ... until I went through it—if I wouldn't have went through it, I wouldn't have believed it, you know what I'm sayin'? I don't know, man ... it wasn't hard. After '95 hit, it wasn't hard for nothin', because everybody in Austin was lookin' for a Screw tape with either Keke, Fat Pat ... and then as it went on Pokey, E.S.G.—E.S.G. went in Screw house and just used to do 100-minute tapes. He'd just freestyle. And they knew who it was, with "Swangin' & Bangin'," and all that. So, it just got easier, and anybody that came in and done somethin' with Screw really got them a fan base *in* Austin from that.

You were talking about Screw's first concert in Austin. Do you remember when that was?

That was in '96.

What do you remember about Screw's skills?

The dude was just good with his hands, period. I mean turntables, he used to cut hair ... I remember like when he first start DJing, we used to walk around Smithville with jamboxes. We was walkin' one day, and his handle on his jambox broke. He picked up his jambox—it was still playin'—had it under his arm ... his mama was gone to work, he took his jambox loose, went in the living room, took his mama turntable, brought it in the room, and hooked it into his jambox some kinda way. And the thing that used to switch it from radio to tape? On the jambox? He made it into a fader. And I was like, "Damn!" He was like 13-years-old when he done this.

This was in Smithville?

This was in Smithville. And there was a guy that stayed across the street from us named DJ Butts. He would go over there—this is how we would make our little tapes—he would go over there and borrow a turntable from him. The jambox he had had RCA plugs on it, too. So he had this one turntable—his mama turntable—playin' on the inside of the jambox, and he had the *other* turntable plugged in with the RCA jack. No headphones. And he put six by nines all around his room for music, and one little old stereo speaker right in the middle, and he just start ... he started mixin' from there, with no headphones. I *wish* I had some of the tapes that he made back then. They wouldn't have been great quality, because he had one of them little black tape recorders sittin' up by the speaker recordin' the tapes. Or we would get in front, or lay down and freestyle in front of the tape recorder with the music playin', but the mixes was just ... I mean they were just off the chain, even to us back then, and we was just like 13 ... he was 13, I was 12. We used to take these home and jam 'em, but we could only make ... every tape was different. Because we could only record one tape ... and we never thought about, you know, dubbin' back then. They was just ... we would be at his house at like two in the morning—at this young age! At two in the morning, talkin' like we got a radio station ...

Well, you did.

Yeah! And we just be in there just makin' little tapes. We might do two or three tapes in one night! Just different songs, mixing different songs. You know, you had 60-minute tapes back then, and they wasn't really long. They was some cheap tapes. And then he just ... I don't know, that was just what we liked to do! We'd get out of school and we'd go to his house ... I mean, I got in trouble a lot of nights! Going over there and just sittin' in, but we wasn't in no trouble, though! If it just came down to it and my t-lady, my old man was lookin' for me, they would know exactly where to come. You didn't have to worry about me bein' too much of no other place, and if I wasn't there, then we was *all* gone somewhere. It got to a point where his mama started putting a time limit on the door. We used to do it so much, you know what I'm sayin'? You'd walk up to the door and the piece of paper might … today it might say, "No coming until after three." Tomorrow it might say "After four," the next day it might say "After five." Then you knew not to knock on the door, turn around, and at that time, you could come over there and it's all good. She never had no problem with us. I think it was more just gettin' a peace of mind. She was workin' two or three jobs. She was workin' like two or three jobs and she wrote her own blueprints out, got 'em a house. When somebody do that, and we understand this now that we grown, sometimes they just want peace. For a few minutes, you know. She never had no problems with it.

So this is Screw's mom or Al-D's mom?

No, this is Screw's mom, when he was in Smithville.

He didn't have so much of a relationship with her afterwards, yeah?

Well, it's a kinda tricky thing …

Yeah, that's what I've always understood. About her.

Because a lot of … I'm not sayin' nothin' was wrong with nothin' … I didn't find out actually what happened 'til later on, when we grew up, that … okay, I came to Screw's house one day and he was gone. And his mama looked at me and said, "Baby, he moved to Houston." This was like in the middle of the night. I was just *with* him yesterday! He ain't tell me nothin' about he was movin' to Houston. And then, it's like, through the middle of the night, he was *gone.* But then, after me and *her* was sittin' down, and the words came out of her mouth that it was either that Pops gonna have to pay child support … so instead of him payin' child support, he came and picked Screw up, to move him to Houston. So, it wasn't … I guess he didn't wanna come up with the money to pay child support. He just … "It's my son, let him come stay with me."

Yeah.

So, I mean, you know … it was rough for Screw either way. He used to still come home like Christmas, Thanksgiving, you know, holidays like that.

To Smithville.

Yeah.

So what family did he still have out there? He had his mom, did he have some aunts and uncles?

His mom, his sister, his grandma, his cousin …

So he had a lot of family out there.

Yeah! Screw was the only person that left. He was the only person that shot out. He was … and I guess it was under them situations, you know what I'm sayin'? He can't pay child support … "I'm not gonna pay child support. My son can come stay with me." So he was gone, you know. And I can't say that that wasn't the best thing for him as far as his *music,* because Houston is a big city, and I believe it never woulda gotten that far just doin' it in Smithville.

You would think so, thinking about the influences and just everything he's hearing, that he was able to get to, everything like that.

But under other conditions, the things he had to go through, I just … I didn't kinda understand that, you know. Or even the way he was even treated when he *got* there. That made Screw strong. I can just say that made Screw strong.

You can see that [Al-D] gets a lot of it from his mama [with whom Screw was close]. I've never met his dad, but you can see that's where he gets it from, and that trickled down to Screw.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. You're sure right. Screw introduced me and Al … he got off of lock, and Screw house … no, I came to Houston, and him and Screw was sittin' in the house—he introduced us—and me and Al been cool ever since. I'm talkin' about outta everybody out of the Click, that's the person I clicked with the most. Like, say now, Screw ain't around … I *know* I ain't gonna have no problems dealin' with Al. Because of just the type of person he was, man. That dude, man … that dude done taught me a lot, man … that dude really taught me a lot, and he really filled my spirit up to be the person that I am now. And that's one of the main reasons why I came back to Austin after Screw died, because I was *hurtin'* so bad, and I was like ... I just wanted to come back and be around my kids. I didn't wanna ... I didn't wanna take them trips like that no more. For one, Screw wasn't there, and everything wasn't bein' done the same, but ... losin' Screw ... I just ... got to a point where I felt like I couldn't take it, man. I was so stressed out when I got back here that ... I say, I just wanna be around my kids. I wanna, you know, watch them and when they need me, I'm right here, and stuff like that. But at the same time, like when Screw was livin', my *son* ... in the summertime, my son and Screw nephew would come stay with us. So I still had dinner with my kids when I was livin' in Houston. I would come home like every other weekend, every two or three weekends I'd come home, see them, you know, and kick it with them. I was still comin' back, but just ... losin' Screw, I just felt like I was just ... I don't know. I ain't wanna see anybody else leave, and I ain't gonna say that didn't happen, 'cause we lost a lot of more people after Screw done died, but it got to that point where I wasn't as focused because he's ... he's *missing*, you know what I'm saying? And when you tryin' to do a lot of stuff, and you know, there ain't too many people in your corner ... the only people in your corner *is* Al-D and ... shit, that was probably *it*. Everybody else was just hopin' something else go wrong, so they would have a reason to do other *shit*. But Al-D was always there. Me and Al-D actually moved in together after Screw died. 'Cause we was all kinda like ... Al had his own place, but he was always over there. We all stayed together.

He had a place in that same apartment building, right?

Yeah, when they was ... when they was younger.

Before that, before when you're talking about.

I'm talking about after Screw died, me and Al moved into a little duplex together, and we stayed there for a while. And then I just got to the point where I just said, "Man, I'ma move back to Smithville," I mean to Austin ... and I actually moved to Smithville first, and then I came back to Austin. But I just ... I don't know, I just ... it's been 10 years, and it still seems like it just happened. And it's like that feelin' still ain't went away. I done got a lot better, though. I know we all done got a lot better. It used to be real hard on a lot of people at first, you know. And we still ... we all still do music, but I mean ... that was like the best dude to do music with, man. I mean, for real. You know he wasn't fittin' to try to screw over you, but now you gotta take a chance on somebody tryin' to screw over you.

When you talk about that feeling, you're talking about the feeling that you had once he was gone or the feeling that you had while he was around?

I mean, it was a totally different feelin' when he was around because we always knew things was ... everything was gonna be *good*. You don't *get* that feelin' dealin' with people now. You gotta *watch* 'em. Like ... I wanna take my album up to this place ... I got a 50/50 chance of me gettin' my money off of it. And I even went through that dealin' with this dude in California. You know, he talk real *good* ... for a couple of years. I done an album, and then me and Keke done a little album together. Got a little change off of it, but then *he* disappeared, so ... it's just ... Screw never ... he never tried to get over on nobody. That's just the type of person he was. And I told him ... maybe a couple years before he died, I told him, "Man, I really don't wanna do music with nobody else but you. That's the only person I would ever do music with, is you."

What did he say to that?

He said one of his number one words, was, "Man, that's real." And it was like, I ain't gotta worry about no contracts, none of that. I just had that feelin'. I don't have to worry about none of that. I don't ... I know you ain't fittin' to try to get over on me, you know?

That wasn't just because you knew him from back in the day, though.

No, that's just the type of person he was. That's just like he done everybody else, you know what I'm sayin'? Only thing I didn't really *get* was ... I mean, you know, I believe it was everybody got they own destiny, even when there's a Click, you got ... everybody got they own destiny. I just think a lot of times ... I sit up and I still think about this ... sometimes, I think some people move too fast. Because I think if people woulda done just small things a little different, it would have been a different reaction as a whole game plan of doin' tapes or even doin' *albums.*

In Houston?

Yeah, yeah. Out of the Click! I mean, I just … I know everybody got they own best plan, everybody wanna do they own thing and everybody … but I think if people woulda clenched around Screw a *little* better than what they did, then as soon as he gettin' them in the limelight, they takin' off tryin' to do they thing … because I sit in the car and listen to this dude talk to different major labels tryin' to sign *him*, and him not takin' it because he's trying to make sure everybody eat. He coulda signed with a major label back in '97, '98, but he didn't take it because he was tryin' to make sure *everybody* got on. Or the people that he really thought could, you know, could really do something, and bring somethin' off the top. He was tryin' to make sure all these people ate, and I'm listenin' to the dude tell 'em, "Man, I got a check for you right now, you can go buy you a Benz and take your girl out to a nice restaurant," and he tell the dude, "Man, I'm already takin' my girl to a nice restaurant. I want *everybody* to be comfortable." And that's just … that's just the type of dude he was. And if they woulda came with the right … you wanna call it the right "price," or gave him the right situation, he woulda went and let everybody know what was goin' on. But I guess his thing was, you know, until they get right, I can't … I'm not gonna tell nobody, "Okay, this person wanna sign us," and then we start jumpin' the gun. He wanted to make sure everything was right.

It wasn't about money for him.

Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

When you think about the direction he took with his career and his tapes and his shop, it couldn't possibly have been about money.

Nah, nah, nah. Because he was actually … I mean, even before he got the shop he was helpin' people pay they rent, pay they light bill, you know …

There's that part of it, and then he was making stars out of people. Rapping on his tapes, they were becoming stars. They were becoming huge. Careers were born out of his tapes.

And you know, I would guarantee … I ain't gonna say everybody, but a few of them was probably doin' it for *fun*, and then the … in a matter of months, a couple of years, it turned into a career. "Okay, hey man, I need to make a Screw tape tonight. We gonna go over there, we gonna freestyle on a tape," and then … "Hold up! Hold on! People are listenin' to me, man! This is for real! I can do this!" You get 50,000 fans to buy your tape, and you put it out *yourself*, you got you a nice check.

That's all you need.

Yeah! Hell yeah. I used to always look at that. I was like, "Man, if it wasn't for Screw …" I ain't gonna say I just got a big name, but I'm well known, and I can pretty much do something and get a good response out of it, you know, and it's all because of him. I mean, God first at all times with me, but it's because of him, what he did on them turntables, and puttin' me out there … I'da never got myself out there that far in the manner of *time* that I got out there, in the short time span that got me to where I'm at. It woulda took me a little longer—a lot longer—if I was to do it on my own.

Well you were part of a broadcast. I mean, wouldn't you consider what he did like a broadcast?

Like a underground radio station or somethin'! And that was the … that was crazy, man, because when he stayed on Greenstone, major labels would *send* him CDs, records, to put *on* his tapes to promote they shit.

Far be it from him getting in trouble, it was like, "I'm gonna go ahead and send you this."

Yeah. Yeah! I mean, because he was makin' … by him puttin' a song off of somebody album, the South found out about who you was, and then they would go buy your album. They wasn't just listenin' to it from the Screw tape. They wanted to go hear what else you had to offer, and that was one thing about it—he didn't never slow down somebody *whole* album. That wasn't on his agenda. His agenda was to help you the best way he knew how, and that was with the turntables set up with his style of slowin' it down, and that's what he did. And he got a lot of love from a lot of rappers. I met a lot of rappers from different states *from* that. I met the Outlaws ... I was up there *one* night, he got a phone call ... I'm just fittin' to leave, he said, "Man, I'm fittin' to go to dinner with Ice-T." I'm gettin' ready to leave, Ice-T pull up in a limo! Pick him up. They leave and go to dinner! I mean, this dude was ... he met them because he was Screw, but he met a *lot* more people than me ... I mean there was literally rappers that walked up to his door, like Master P. He never got to meet C-Bo, which was one of the rappers he used to love, but *C-Bo* even came to his house one day. He was asleep, and his cousin didn't wake him up. I think he was mad for about a week behind that.

Was it Big Bubb?

Nah, I wanna say it was D-Ray. So after Screw woke up, he said, "Man, this dude came over here," and he said, "What was the dude name?" And he said "C-Bo." "You ain't wake me up?" So he never got to meet C-Bo, but the crazy thing about it, we was readin' a magazine, and *Screw* was one of the people C-Bo always wanted to meet. And back in the day, *these* dudes used to look like brothers to me.

Screw and C-Bo?

Yeah! So Screw went into his studio, grabbed a C-Bo album, and came back out and showed ... it was either D-Ray or Lil' D, and said, "Is this the dude that came to the door?" And he said, "Yeah." And [Screw] got *so* mad because it was somebody he always wanted to meet. I'm tryin' to think of who else I done seen come through there ... E-40, D-Shot came, and there was another cat with them ...

He never got Mac Dre through there, did he?

No, he got Spice 1. He got Spice 1 on a tape! Those are just some of the names ... we pulled up to a concert in Bryan–College Station. B-Legit and Richie Rich walked up to us. That's the first time I heard somebody say something about they had supposed to've smoked 'Pac ashes. I don't know how true it is! But then I heard people start rappin' about that shit, after maybe a year after they said it. They said, "Man, we put some of 'Pac ashes in a blunt, and smoked it." And I was like, "For *real*?"

Well, you gotta pack something in there.

Yeah, man. Screw said, "Would you smoke my ashes?" I told him, "Naw, man. I respect you too much for that. That just wouldn't seem right."

(2008)

MC Wickett Crickett

FIFTH WARD

One of the earliest proponents of rap music in Houston, he arrived in the city in the 1970s from New York and soon began hosting shows with live bands and rappers in Fifth Ward cafés. He is credited with giving DJ Screw his first DJ gig, and has remained a visible and important part of Houston rap culture through the years, still hosting talent shows and club nights in the city to this day.

What year did you come to Houston?

Well, I was down here in the '70s on and off. But the thing about it is the *rap* era didn't start down here until '80 … '82, '83. It was something new to them. Because I was going to clubs, freestylin', hosting little shows, but they didn't know what it was. They had *bands* playing in clubs, people singin' … they used to have talent nights and I used to get up there and win the prizes 'cause I would freestyle … like the drummer would play a beat—I'd tell him to put a beat on—and I'd just freestyle about the people in the audience. They didn't know what that was, like being able to rhyme and talk about what people got on and what the next person is doin' and all of that. That was something new to them.

Was this before the Rhinestone Wrangler?

Yeah that was *way* before the Rhinestone Wrangler.

What clubs were you in, then—talking about late '70s, early '80s?

Well, back during that time they used to have a club that used to be called The Fresh Connection. It used to be off of Kelley … and what was that street … Los Angeles? It was right there by Kelley. I know it was off of Kelley and something. But it was before you get to Hirsch Road. I know that last street … they put up a bus station there now, but everybody in the '70s and the early '80s, that's where they used to go, to The Fresh Connection. It was right on the Northside. It was like real, real crunk. And then they had a club on the Southside called The Blue Ice. They had another little club, there was Turning Point I, Turning Point II. And they was all café clubs. They didn't really have these clubs. That came when the hip-hop scene came. But before the hip-hop scene, everything was like café clubs because you had bands playin' in clubs.

So it was kind of spread out. The club on the Southside—where was that? Ice …

That was club *Blue* Ice. That was on the Southside. Turning Point I, Turning Point II, and there was another club—it's still there. I can't think of the name of it but it's on OST [Old Spanish Trail] and what is that ... that turns into Griggs ... where it split up there. At Griggs and Calhoun. There was a little club right there. Can't think of it ...

The Spot?

Right across from Church's Chicken. It's been there for *ages*. And it's still there. And one of the dudes that I met, he was DJ Slick Rick down here. He now plays guitar for a dude named Mel Waiters, which is a professional blues cat. But he was like one of the first DJs I met down here that really like helped me out a lot when I first came down here. It's like right across from Church's on Griggs. Right there at Griggs and Calhoun, there's a little club right there. Been there for ages. It look like it's small, but go in and it's all right ... it's pretty ... a nice size.

You're not talking about The Spot? That really long place next to King's?

Nah, it's not called The Spot. It's right across the street from Church's Chicken. On Griggs and Calhoun. I can't think of the name of it, but it's blue on the outside.... oh, I know what the name of it is: the name of it is King Leo's. That's what it is. King Leo's.

So what was going on there? You were in there and people were freestyling ...

I was the only one freestylin'. They had comedy nights. They would have comedy and *bands* playing in clubs. They didn't know nothing about the rap era. The era really hadn't got to them yet. The first thing they knew about rap down this way was "Rapper's Delight" and Kurtis Blow. But rap had been out. Rap had *been* out before then. You had rappers been out in New York who'd never even made it out this way.

Once it came in, did it creep in or did it explode?

It kind of exploded. It kind of exploded because people knew about it from "Rapper's Delight" and from Kurtis Blow. Kurtis Blow came with stories, and that was like ... to hear somebody rap about stories about "these are the breaks." "These Are The Breaks" was a story about what you go through every day in life. So, in the beginning, most of your songs was tellin' stories, and that's what rap was. In the beginning, hip-hop was *fun* music with stories about the government, with no money, no jobs, poverty, you know ... "New York, New York / Big city of dreams / everything in New York ain't always what it seems / you might be fooled if you come from out of town / But I'm down by law and I know my way around / too much, too many people ..." know what I'm saying—all the stories back then was true stories and so rap in the beginning was telling people just what it *was*, but it wasn't ... it wasn't so much *violence*. There was a lot of violence under rap, but it wasn't as violent as it was when the late '80s came in because when the late '80s came in, the world had been introduced to crack. But before that—before crack came—it was always drugs, but it was drugs that *older* people used. Like Quaaludes and mollies and trees. You know, in the '70s, a bag of weed—a $10 bag of weed was called a *lid*, and it was like a fat sandwich bag. You know, now a $10 bag of weed ain't no more than like a little old small something, you know, I mean everything changed. Weed wasn't the problem. When crack came in, crack took over. 'Cause crack was something that *anybody* could afford. You couldn't *get* no heroin ... when [Laid Back] put the song out about heroin, that was the *drug*. Heroin was the drug, the white horse. That was about heroin because people that had a little money was shootin' heroin. That was like the tightest high you could get, was heroin. Everybody was gettin' strung out on needles. But then ... a lot of people couldn't afford that fix, so they just broke it down to crack, and made it where anybody could afford crack.

That hit Houston, too ... you're talking about '84, '85, '86 ...

Yeah, but when it came to Houston, it was *pure*, and what happened was the Colombians that was comin' down here from Miami was bringin' it down here and makin' friends in the black neighborhoods with the blacks, and telling them that this was something that, once they got it started out there ... because see, a lot of the early people that smoked it became dope fiends because they thought it was something they could *handle.* When they first started smoking it, they smoked it smashed up ... you know, they smashed the rock up and you could roll it in a joint with some weed. So they thought it was like something to enhance the weed in the beginning. And they called it *primos.* Well, they felt like, "I'm smoking weed *and* this, I'm not gonna get hooked." But they didn't understand that they was steady getting hooked because it was a *mellow* drug. The crack in the beginning, it started off smellin' kinda sweet and mellow, but it was still cocaine. So then, the more you got hooked on it, the more you didn't *want* the weed. You *wanted* the pure cocaine. You need the whole high. And the crack in the beginning was pure crack. It wasn't cut. People didn't start cuttin' it until the '90s because they wanted to flip they money. So instead of them givin' 'em pure crack, they was goin' to them lil' shops, them lil' weed shops and novelty shops to buy some stuff called Propane, recookin' they stuff and givin' 'em half coke and half *blow.*

What was it? Was it baking soda? What was that stuff?

No, it wasn't baking soda. It was like the same stuff you used for toothache or somethin'. It was like to numb your gums ... it was the same effect.

Novocaine.

Yeah. That was the same effect.

So they were using that because people would notice the difference a lot less because it was a numbing effect.

They wouldn't notice the difference because crack did the same thing.

So it wasn't really until the early '90s that people started to cut it. You're right in that people didn't really understand crack when it came out, especially how it snuck through, but it became the "epidemic" through the media and ...

You had two types of people that had gotten involved with it. You had the people who was already on horse, and when *they* got it, it was because they couldn't afford the high stuff no more, so instead of trying to pay $50 for a *bag,* you could take $50 and buy a bunch of big *rocks,* and just cut 'em up and smoke rocks all day. So when they couldn't afford the heroin, the straight powder, they were buyin' crack, and crack was so pure ... the first crack was so pure when it came in, that, you know ... the only thing was it kept you high, but it had you where you wanted to keep buyin' it. Heroin had a *longer* high, but heroin was more *expensive.*

Was heroin really popular in Houston in the early '80s, the mid-'80s?

Well, in the '70s, it was low, low, low key. But it wasn't as bad. Heroin was never really bad down here like it was in New York. Only ... it was a small like ... pimps ... like pimps, you had pimps that came from Dallas and other places and they would get they girls hooked on heroin or some shit. Normally pimps used that shit, but regular people ... wasn't too many regular people messin' with that shit because the '70s was the era of the *blues.* Texas is more the blues people, and you had ... Louisiana was like ... they *next door.* So they was into blues and zydeco. But see New York is like right there on the water where the drug trades was, so you got New York, New Jersey, Mississippi, Manhattan ... you know, Miami. You got all these people that's right there on the coast, so the *drug* is right there. For them, to get money *this* way ... it *never* was the East Coast, the East Coast was never bringin' drugs *here.* You know, they had their *own* problems. New Jersey, Detroit ... all them areas wasn't too busy ... you know, the crack was right *there,* so they was too busy killin' each other for turfs. The crack was already there.

All the crack that was coming into Houston in the 1980s was from Miami, wasn't it?

Yeah, the crack that came into Houston was from Miami. Colombians. Once the Colombians came down here and turned Houston onto it, and you had certain areas of people that had money, that got together, and had millions, put all they money together and sent people *to* Miami to do the pickups. Well, in the early times, the laws didn't really know nothing about the interstate. You could ride all out of town. Crack wasn't really a big epidemic, and they wasn't really worried about ... highway patrol was never really just stoppin' nobody to check they car for drugs or none of that. That scene didn't come in until after the rap era got real, real tough. After rap got tough, and rappers started rappin' about how they go up and down the highway doin' this, that, and the other ... that's how the laws started figuring out, "Okay, so this how they movin' it." When they would see cars come in from out of town somewhere with different license plates, they might just take a chance just to stop and check 'em, just because they kind of looked halfway suspicious. The majority of the time, they would come up with something, so the more they start catchin' people on the interstate, that made 'em start bein' more aware of how it's getting *in*. A lot of rappers shot theyself in the foot because they was telling too much in they rap songs, even how they was FedExin' stuff. You know, they got to the point where they was mailin' stuff to ... they might mail it to an address, and wrap it and FedEx it straight to that person. They was all kinda ways it was goin' on. Greyhound buses or whatever. You know, it got in. Too many rappers started tellin' the stories about what they was doin', and that's how the cops started knowin' stuff.

And that was coming through I-10. That was all coming through Louisiana, Mississippi ...

Yeah, I-10. I-10 was the problem. Anything going I-10 was always ... that was it. They told too many stories about I-10. I mean, you could leave Houston and go all the way to Penn State. Three days to Penn State or whatever, I mean you always had people to take it. It just was that when people got busted on the interstate, they started givin' up too much information to make they case a little cheaper 'cause actually it was like ... the laws didn't want who they caught. They wanted who the *source* was. They were like, "We know *you* not the person. You're the person who he's makin' some money off of. We wanna know who you're *gettin'* it from. What's your contact?" So if the person didn't snitch, what they did was they took they cell phones and they just kept records of all the numbers that was in they phone. And they would like call these people back, or follow these people to take pictures of them and they'd start sending out secret indictments. So you got like 20 people involved, and different areas getting a secret indictment, and not knowing who's tellin' on who and they start all tellin' on each other.

So this is all like late '80s, early '90s that you're talking about?

Yeah.

The I-10 Connect. A lot of people were talking about that.

Just about every rapper. Dallas ... even Dallas. Everybody knew. Because see, when Miami brought it in, Miami didn't stop in Louisiana. Miami people had a lot of people they deal with right here in Houston, Texas. 'Cause Houston, Texas is so *big*, that people down here was grindin', as to where you couldn't take a chance of takin' nothin' to New Orleans, because New Orleans was like the murder capital of the world. Plus, New Orleans—if you got caught with anything in New Orleans, you got 10 years. You got straight 10 years. They was up under the *other* law, whereas in Houston, if you got 10 years you mighta did five years.

Or three.

Instead of 10. How it was in that time—that was before they changed up everything. You know, when the crack came, that was during the time when the government had moved all the foreigners over here and gave them bank accounts and stuff. That's when all your Koreans came in, your Chinese, your Japanese ... you know, then your flea market turned in ... or opened up, because flea markets in the '70s was vegetables and grapes and stuff like that. Then flea markets turned into places to go get jewelry and clothes and all that other little stuff. Little clothes that was remade over, with a name like the real name, but it wasn't the real stuff.

Knockoffs.

Yeah, see the *first* flea markets was *vegetables*. Flea markets was groceries and vegetables. That's what flea markets was in the beginning. But when crack came, flea markets became places for the Koreans and all your little small vendors to set up in one big spot. And sell they merchandise.

How did crack change that, when crack came into Houston?

Crack changed the mentality. Crack changed the mentality of the whole era. Crack changed the era of goin' to school, and getting a summer job … you know, before crack came, kids used to … couldn't wait 'til the summer come, so they could apply for a summer job, get a summer job workin' at Astroworld or one of them parks, or one of them schools. But once crack came, you know, people dropped out of school because they parents was either *on* it, or … the daughter was goin' with somebody who was sellin' it, and he already had a car and was pickin' her up, takin' her to school. He givin' the mama money that the mama didn't have, the daddy wouldn't have. So he'd up and pay rent, and then the government started this … the government was all part of the whole thing. I mean, they knew … it was *they crack*, so they knew that it was gonna get moved. During that time, what they did was—to make sure that it got moved, they opened up a bunch of government projects. That way they would know *just* where they drugs was bein' moved *at*. That way … when they opened up the government projects, they knew that the girls' rent wasn't no more than $5 or $10. So common sense … if she got a kid and her rent ain't nothing but $5 or $10, and these cats here, if she halfway look like something, they gonna stay with her and move they issue 'cause it's in a project area. So that way the laws ain't got to look all everywhere, they can look right in certain neighborhoods where the project apartments at, and they know that's just where the fiends and everything was at, 'cause they rent wasn't nothin'. So they know if the cats got nice cars parked in them kind of places, they know that's where they stuff bein' moved at, so all they got to do is just target those projects, and target the stores in that area. They know they either hangin' at the store, or they somewhere in the projects. So it's easier for them to bust these cats and get either the money back or some of the dope back. That's why people are screaming "recession" now, because there's no drugs! There's no bad money! And that's why the people that *have* money, the older people that got money in the banks, you know, your Walgreens and your McDonalds and Burger Kings, all this old money that's been around for ages … Sears and stuff, they money *been* in the bank. So it was okay for the banks to loan they money out, because they knew they money was gettin' *flipped*. Well *now*, all that old money, them people done said, "Don't *loan* my money out no more. Don't trust my money." So, these banks ain't got no money to loan out, and credit cards … ain't nothin' you can do, 'cause you done issued all these credit cards to all these people that ain't got the money to pay it. So now they programs, saying, "If you're in credit card debt, call these here numbers," so they can let you pay it little by little, because they realize it's better to get *some* money out of 'em than none at *all*.

But it's still predatory.

Yeah, but you're still not gonna pay back all the money you owe, because they know you ain't got it.

Of course not.

And there's no drugs here. There's no bad money no more. That's why you can damn near get a new car for little to nothin' because there's no money. Import and export, all them other places that was over here was over here because the importing and exporting was good with the drugs because the United States was tradin' guns to these foreign countries. So these foreign countries was *makin'* money over here. Your towels, your plates, shit by China, shit by Japan. Your foreign cars. You know, all that shit, you're tradin' with these places and at the same time, you're steady sayin', "United States," when actually, you just got people over here so you could watch 'em. It had nothing to do with the United States. It had to do with, "If you keep an eye on 'em, you know just what's goin' on, 'cause you got half of 'em over here."

Do you think the goal was to get crack into the hands of the African Americans of the baby boom generation?

That's exactly what it was. What it was, see, that was *my* era. That was *my* era when crack came. So, when crack came during *my* era, it was like the black people during that time ... see what happened was yeah, it was *given* to black people, but it was given to black people to *move.* And what happened was they didn't really get worried about it until a lot of white kids started gettin' hooked on it, and they couldn't understand how it could be.

That's when it made it to the news.

It was supposed to have been just a black, hood thing. Once they started seein' a lot of white kids was just as bad hooked on crack, and white *business* people—you had white *business* people that was loanin' they Porsches and they Benz out. To get crack. You know, and they couldn't understand how did that happen. It was because it was a cheap drug. Everybody took it as a *game* in the beginning. A little old rock like that? You looked at that little old rock and said, "Oh, this can't—this not gonna make me want *more.*" But you didn't know the effect it would have on your body. Some people could smoke crack, and it didn't do nothing to 'em, as to where other people smoke crack and it took 'em *over.* And see, the early crack was the *pure* crack, so once you got a taste of that pure crack when it first came out, you was always searchin' for *that.* So you could spend your money getting blow up, 'cause you was gettin' a *piece* of the high. You wasn't gettin' the whole high that you got when the crack first came, so you had to continuously pay money as to where you're spending *20* to really get *10.* You see, everybody wanna say that crack was put in the neighborhoods to mess up the black families or whatever, but that really wasn't what it was. It was because crack ... crack was brought over here by Colombians *to* black cats that was tryin' to be hustlers and make quick money. That's all that was.

They didn't care who they were selling it to.

Yeah. They didn't care who, it was just ... when they first started out, they was like ... it was really like smoke ... before crack even came, people were smoking embalming fluid.

Wet.

Well, *now* they call it Sherm, but back then they was callin' it Angel Dust. People was rollin' it up in paper squares, and hittin' it, and other people didn't know. They thought they was smokin' *weed.* In my era, they was callin' it Angel Dust. It's the same thing. When somebody used to get hooked, they didn't know what they was getting hooked *on.* They just thought it was pot that they could handle. "$10? I can get high for $10? Oh come *on.*" And see, when it first started out, a $10 rock was like ... big sized when it first started. But once people started realizin' that they could cut that in half, and sell it for 10, then it became a money issue.

They were cutting it with all kinds of stuff! I talked to someone once who told me he was cutting embalming fluid with elephant tranquilizers, ether ...

And that's what *he* was doin', and he probably was killin' people! You had other people that was mixin' it with Novocaine and Propane just to blow it up, but they wouldn't try to put all that extra shit in there because they wanted the customer to keep comin' back and they was too afraid to get a murder case.

But what I'm saying is that, in every situation, you didn't really *know what it was being cut with. Like if you were to buy it, if you were to go on the street and buy it, even 10, 20 years later ... how do you really know what it's cut with? How do you even know what you're smoking?*

You talking about the Sherm?

Or the Angel Dust, assuming that's pretty much the same thing.

Sherm and Angel Dust, yeah, that's the same thing. Well, you never know what that shit cut with, period. That's a murder case, 'cause that's embalming fluid. I have a sister-in-law—as we speak, I got a sister-in-law *just* went to jail for that shit.

She was selling it?

Yep. She on a $30,000 bond right now! *Just* went to jail like ... I mean, that's a major case. That Sherm is a major case. Drugs is what run the whole United States, and until another drug come out that ... a lot of money is bein' moved again, the United States is gonna be at a standstill. Like it is right now. And that's why you're gonna hear more about jackin' and robbin', 'cause these cats is used to gettin' up, outside and makin' $500–$1,000 a day. And that's gone like the buffalos. That's why you don't even have a… like you used to have that *City Under Siege*? That's been gone. *City Under Siege* used to be comin' knockin' and kickin' doors and runnin' people down. That's been gone because they found out half the time, a lot of the laws that was bustin' people was putting the crack right back out there, givin' it to some people they knew to sell it in they area. So I mean, there was so much investigation that half the time they would take the money and the dope, and wouldn't return all the money that they took off of people or whatever. So you got corruption everywhere. That's gone. 'Cause there ain't no dope corners like there used to be. The laws been known that. That's why they game is driver's license and insurance now.

Do you think there's a new drug on the horizon that's going to change the makeup of the United States in the way it's been changed before?

Nah, the drug era out of there. The only thing that was close to it was the X pills. Now, the X pills is cheap. People don't even *get* high like that no more. 'Cause the *music* ain't the same. The *music* was what made you get more high. But now, all of the music is relaxed. It ain't no gangsters no mo'. All the gangsters you used to listen to *ain't gangsters!* They done played in movies and shit now. The laws and government let you know it wasn't no gangsters 'cause they put 'em in the movies playin' cops.

Ice Cube, Ice-T.

There wasn't no more gangsters! So once the *music* changed, everybody's more mellowed out now. You know, ain't nobody on that old… that rough high. Because, now people laid back. I mean, ain't no more turfs to fight over. Ain't no more, "This mine, I'll sell my dope where I wanna sell it," or, "Screw the law" and all that. All that era gone! Ain't no more, "Go get your TEC-9 and shoot up the hood" and all that. All that's over with.

Lemme ask you this: you saw this because you were in Houston at this time, but in the early '80s when rap came into Houston, it was very innocent along the template of what was happening on the East Coast, with groups like Def IV and Royal Flush and even the early Ghetto Boys sounding like their New York contemporaries…

Well, Ghetto Boys… Ghetto Boys was the first really *gangster*—if you check the era, Ghetto Boys themselves really, because they saw a lot of gangster stuff, so when they came out they was really gangster in the beginning, period. They was always gangster. Def IV… Def IV was tryin' to be hip-hop. They was more or less hip-hop, because one of them came from New York anyway. And you know, Royal Flush was from the West Coast—one of them was from the West Coast. I mean, they were from different areas, but Ghetto Boys themselves were straight Fifth Ward gangsters from the dope era or whatever. That's why Scarface and all them, they told us stories of the dope era. Of what they saw. Of the gangster stuff. You know, they grew up among the dice shootin', the pimps… because Lyons Avenue and Liberty Road and all that is where the prostitutes used to walk 24/7. It was the lands of the pimps and players and hustlers. You know, the dice shooters, the card sharks, the early '70s to '79—all the way up to '79 and '80 was the blues and the cafés and the gyp joints and the pimps and the prostitutes. And the heroin. And the Qualuudes and the trees and the mollies. You know, the black mollies. That was all the early drugs back then.

What neighborhoods was all that being moved in?

Third Ward and Fifth Ward. Because see, Fifth Ward used to go all the way to Downtown.

And Third Ward encompasses Downtown. A lot of people don't realize that, but if you look at a map of those old political divisions…

Third Ward by Elgin. Because they had an old radio station that closed down that was really one of the first hip-hop stations, that was KYOK. And then you got KCOH, that's part of Third Ward right there over by Almeda. KCOH is still around. But LaBranch ... LaBranch was where KYOK used to be at.

LaBranch and what?

I can't think of the other street, but it was off of LaBranch, and that's where—that era, that was when the first rap concerts came to Houston. After they went out of business, then you had Love 94 came in. But then Love 94 got sued, because one of they DJs was makin' fun of Michael Jackson when he had that accident when his hair got burnt up. And they sued them ... they sued Love 94 right off the air.

So what's the first rap concert you remember coming to Houston?

I *did* the first rap concert come to Houston. It was at Astroworld. It was the Swatch Watch Fresh Fest.

Who was playing?

It was Run–D.M.C., Whodini, Fat Boys ... that was the first actual rap concert. I was one of the hosts of that show. It was a tour. It was the first tour that ever came to Houston. It was called the Swatch Watch Fresh Fest.

When the Fat Boys had their own Swatch Watch—The Limelight. Was that '86, '87? That wasn't the tour the Geto Boys were on, though.

Nope. The Geto Boys came later. They was doin' something, but they never really did anything like that with them. When they did stuff, they did stuff like at uh ... JB's Entertainment Center. On Scott Street. That's when they had Run–D.M.C. that came. They had that group that had that song out "What People Do For Money." After that they had a couple of little old rap shows came after that. You know, rap was still new, and the young people was into it, but a lot of the young people in Houston didn't *have* studios. Rap-A-Lot had the studio, then there was a group out called Jefferson Ink out the Southside. Wayne Jefferson and them put out the first Southside song and the first song on the Northside before Rap-A-Lot was a *band* called ... they had a song called "Bedrok." I can't remember the name of the band but the song was called "Bedrok." With Ricky Taylor and them. 'Cause the same dude who did that with them was ... he started them because he used to be with an R&B group in the '70s called Archie Bell & The Drells. Oh! The Glass band. That was the name of the them. The Glass band. And they had a song called "Bedrok."

So is this before "MacGregor Park?"

Yeah that was before Rob did "MacGregor Park." He stayed behind Jones School. The man who put him out.

Robert Harlan?

Yeah, because I postered the show when they did it at JB's Entertainment Center.

He was the South Park Rapper, Robert Harlan, right?

It was a *man*, they had a studio at his house. It was a family, and they recorded that for Rob, the dude, the man that did it was a man named Robert. He let his family—they used to throw stuff—they had a big concert comin' up they threw at JB's Entertainment Center. But Rob and them, they did it at his house, at the studio they had in his house. And they had some band perform. During that time Rap-A-Lot was doin' stuff, Lil' J was a good friend of mine. At that time, J came over there to check the show out just to see what it was all about. That's when Rob had that song "MacGregor Park." We was goin' to MacGregor Park on Sundays. But then after the law start trippin', they took it all the way to the Northside and everybody start goin' to Deussen Park on Sundays.

Where's that?

Deussen Park? Way north. It's way on the Northside. That's when Slick Rick's song ["La-Di-Da-Di"] was popular.

I ask because Houston Rap *is a commentary on the neighborhoods where rap came from in Houston—Fifth Ward, Third Ward, South Park ...*

Acres Homes, all the neighborhoods. You gotta understand—all black neighborhoods. All black neighborhoods. And then, there were drugs in Spring Branch because the Hispanics that stayed over there sold drugs, and the white kids was gettin' it. So it was—crack was everywhere, you had certain areas where, like … you know the area of Westheimer where most of the white people stay? Wasn't no drugs over there because there was no small … you know, no … low income over there. Wasn't nothing really over there. If anybody was sellin' drugs over there it was big stuff, it was *weight*. But most of your low income areas is where the drugs at. Anywhere that was a neighborhood that was a lot of blacks or a lot of Hispanics, that's where your drugs was at. The lower income. You know, so that's *all* neighborhoods. Fourth Ward, Third Ward, Fifth Ward, South Park, Sunnyside. The whole Northside—Acres Homes, Trinity Garden, Fifth Ward, Kashmere Gardens, you know, South Park, Sunnyside, Hiram Clarke, Mo City, every *neighborhood*. I mean it was fast money! You know, once crack came in, you stop calling your "girlfriend" your "girlfriend." Your girlfriend became your "gal," you didn't hold hands, you didn't dress alike no more. Y'all didn't go out to the clubs together no mo'. 'Cause everything was like, "Oh, you handcuffin'." So, people start goin' with these slangs they was hearin' on the East and the West Coast, and they forgot how they live down here, more or less start changing they culture. And, you know, the *respect* went out the air. You know, there wasn't no mo' respect no mo'. Once fast money came, you didn't have to respect nobody. That's the way they took it. It's like, "I got my own money. I ain't gotta *yes sir, no sir* you, I ain't gotta wait on you to get your paycheck to buy me somethin'. I'll go make it for myself. I don't have to come in when you tell me to come in. I'm payin' half the bills."

And it wasn't even about your girlfriend—it was just about the way you lived.

No, what I'm sayin' is … even *girls*, period. When crack came in, fast money came in, so if you was a square cat, waitin' to use your mama car for the prom or somebody rentin' you a car … but here go the dude that's young, and he walkin' around with $2,000 or $3,000 in his pocket, *and* a car, and everybody ridin' with him at lunchtime, and he get to take who he *want* to the prom. The girls goin' with the dudes with the money, so they done broke up with they square boyfriends and they out there wantin' to be *seen*. So it's whoever has the money. You know, getting a baby durin' the early '80s was gettin' a baby because of … you knew that you could get your apartment, you could get out of mama's house, get your own apartment and … your rent wasn't no more than $15 or $20, back then. So you wasn't trippin' on havin' no baby. Plus, if you had a baby for a dude that was a big dope dealer, he *had* to take care of you, and your kid. Your rent wasn't nothin', so he was spoilin' you. Buyin' you clothes and everything. 'Cause *he* didn't have to pay no rent. He could stay right there.

Was rent really that cheap back then?

Yeah, $15 to $20.

For a month was $15 or $20?

Yeah. Government apartment. The most you might've paid … you mighta had somebody had to pay $40 or $50 … for a whole month. Then you got somebody that—plus you get stamps, so your refrigerator stayin' full. If the dude ain't gotta pay no rent, and he a big dope dealer, he stayin' there with the girl, and that rent only $40 or $50, he's makin' a killin'.

How do you think that era translates to today, when we're talking about a huge recession and the economic landscape in Houston …

Because it's already done *spoiled* everybody. It's already spoiled everybody. Once the fast money came in, the respect left. People stopped respectin' one another. The whole crack game—it was like everybody respected one another, you went to work, spoke to your neighbors, you bust your butt to get a car … once the crack came in, you could get a car for … quick as hell. You ain't got to bust your butt no more. Wasn't no "wait 'til the end of the week" to get paid. You *made* a $1,000 a day almost. When you makin' that kind of money, you know, you got it in your head you could have any woman you want. And back durin' that time, women wasn't tryin' to be with no one dude unless he was the dude that had all the *money*. So, if he had all the *money*, that's who she was tryin' to be with, else she end up with his potnah. So, when crack was the thing, that's how it was back then. Girls was with whoever had the money. But now…you know, ain't no bunch of dope dealers no mo', so you got a bunch of strippers. They gotta get it for theyself. The dope dealers gone to jail. The rap thang changed. Dudes start rappin'…talking 'bout money over broads. That wasn't the word, but you know…they start sayin' that 'cause they start realizing that they was goin' to jail behind women. So they start sayin'…they start seein' how broads was breakin' up with them and goin' with they potnahs and shit. So broads started havin' it in for women, they start callin'…boy, they was hatin' women. So that's how all the *good* women got stuck out, 'cause all of the *players* was messin' it up for *them.* So once that happened, the gay scene just came right on in. There wasn't no mo' *hidin'* it. You used to didn't *see* a bunch of girls cutting their hair like dudes and dressin' like dudes…but once the crack thang had came in, it was like, "It doesn't matter *who* have money." You had the gay girls dressin' like dudes. *They* had the money.

Was that in one part of Houston in particular?

Nope. That was all—that was everywhere. And it's—*now* it's a common *thang.* The only thing that's bad about it, is there's kids startin' as far as *middle* school already lookin' like that. You got girls in *middle* school that cut they hair and lookin' like dudes in middle school tryin' to go with girls. I mean how can you, at the age of 13 or 14, already know you wanna be with a woman? So, when parents are not parents no mo', they don't have…they can't say, "You can't do this," or, "You can't do that," because they didn't have the money, the jobs. They didn't have the jobs or the money and these kids goin' to school wanna dress like what they see everybody else. And you can't tell 'em nothin' 'cause you smoke crack or you done…bought 'em a bunch of stuff for Christmas and then, Christmas night, while they asleep, you *sold* all the stuff to get your high or whatever. You know how many families, how many kids woke up with *nothin'* Christmas morning? After they *seen* a bunch of toys? Under the tree? And they had to live with knowin' they parents smoked all they toys up that night? You know how many families went through that? Just imagine that feelin'—you a little kid and your mama got the money. The check came, or the dope man bought everything, but then, during the night, they went round to *other* people, and other people's kids got the toys you had under your tree 'cause your parents smoke. So now that everybody's *spoiled,* they don't *know* nothin' about the "bust they ass and get a job." They too *spoiled,* stayin' up all night, makin' money and goin' to the after hours, you know, strippers in Houston…goin' to school, gettin' a good education, get a job. All they know now is "sex sells," because that's how America portray everything.

Kids don't get it now.

Hell, I mean…look at your calendar. You know, look how your calendars is set up. You got *Sports Illustrated*…women get in clubs where everything is catered to sex. That's how America *is.* I mean, even everything you push on TV.

When we were growing up, it was at least a bit more hidden, more held back.

Yeah! Yeah. It was PG, and even PG got to where it was—it got to where it was movin' some of the lil' guidelines on PG! *PG* started bein' X-rated!

Our definitions of that have morphed over the years, but more than being morphed, they've been forced.

But it started with, you know, them contradictin' theyself with sayin'…like, it started with that "freedom of speech" situation. You gotta understand—if you tell America that they got the freedom of speech, so then, once you say that they got the freedom of *speech,* then that mean they can put out these movies that's…everything they doin' is torturin' and killin' women…it's like, "Hey, movies is just actin'." But at the same time, you got people that's lookin' at it that's…that's *feelin'* that shit! So you got people that sits and watch that stuff, and they *live* for the fame, and they look at it like, "Well, one day, they gonna put a movie out about *me.*" So they sittin' up there lookin' at these movies, thinkin' about how much money that's *grossin'* from these people goin' these horror—horror movies gross more than any other movies! Than *love* movies or whatever. They got more people goin' to see Jason and stuff like that than … than any other movie! So once America see that everybody takin' everything for *granted*, that's why nobody really worry about … I seen somebody's kids got snatched right in McDonald's around a lot of people, and nobody even noticed what happened. Everybody just so comfortable with … with what's goin' on … people used to be like, "No, don't go there … you don't know that man." Now, everybody's just so into they own self that … to get snatched right up! Right up under your nose!

And that's the manifestation of the lack of respect you were talking about …

Once people realize that America has always showed you a side that it wanted you to see, that's it. But until people understand that all you can do is get what you can get out of it and try to make the best for you. See, they *had* a chance, like … anybody that came up through the crack era, and *didn't* get a crack case, and *made* a bunch of money, and *put* it up and invested it right? They were the lucky ones. But you had some people thought it was gonna be like that forever. And now they *spoiled*. And the government *knows* if you finish school, if you went to college, what you should be grossin' a year. And so, it's fittin' to get so *critical* that … we headed deeper and deeper into the computer age. The more advanced you see the cell phones, the more advanced you see the video games, people don't really see what's happenin' right round they heads. They steady tryin' to get it to where it won't even be no *money* on the streets no mo'. Everything'll be just like that card that women use to go get groceries or whatever. You won't even have to worry about currency and people gettin' to the bank. They steady tryin' to find ways to advance shit. Just like they made money where it was a strip in it. Okay, some people tryin' to duplicate *that*. They realize *that*. So then they made it to where there was another *face* in there. But that was hard, that was hard for them to do *that*. Everything … people always find ways to duplicate or get around somethin'. That's just America. You got real Rolexes and you got fake Rolexes [*laughs*]. And they both look just alike, except when you turn a *real* Rolex over, it got serial numbers and stuff on it. Each time you buy a Rolex, when you buy it, it have a serial number and everything. Fake Rolex don't have nothin' on the back of it. Everything. They have a way to do it. Gucci. Anything. They always gonna have the remake so they can make they money off of it so the dealers can get paid. Everything is a hustle.

(2010)

DJ Ready Red

DJ/PRODUCER, GETO BOYS 1987–1991

East Coast transplant who became a member of the original Ghetto Boys (which would later change to Geto Boys) upon his arrival in Houston. Worked with the group beginning with the Making Trouble *album and up until their 1991 platinum album* We Can't Be Stopped, *on which his is the first voice you hear in "Rebel Rap Family." Ready Red also did production work on Willie D's classic 1989 album* Controversy. *Back in his home city of Trenton, NJ, he is still an active DJ today.*

You got to Houston before Johnny C, didn't you?

I got to Houston about three months before him, yeah. March of '87.

Was he planning on coming out [to Houston] also?

Not at all. It wasn't even in the cards. Not for that right there. And ... after I got there, my commitment was serious. See, back on the East Coast, this is serious. This is a way of life. With hip-hop ... it's more than just ... it's the cartel. Everything combined together. And when I got there, one by one, except for Jukebox ... he stayed down, and Raheem ... he wanted to go solo. He'd been wantin' to go solo. He was like Houston's LL Cool J. He was gifted with lyrical skills. And K-9 was in and out of jail all the time. So the commitment wasn't there, man. So Jukebox wanted to bring one of his friends named Rapper Lee into the mix. And I said, "Uh ... Lil' J, hey man I got an MC back home named Johnny C." And he heard Johnny C on a demo tape that I had. Next thing you know, Johnny C was catchin' a plane on down.

Raheem said the same thing, that his commitment wasn't to Ghetto Boys. More like he accidentally ended up in Ghetto Boys.

That's how J would just pair people together. See, there has to be some type of uh ... group. You just can't put three or four people together and say, "Okay, you got a group." That's why they don't last long. That's why there's not a lot of longevity in a lot of groups that I see, man, because they mismatch, they misplace, and everybody can't get along sometimes. So you know, that's how that goes. Crews, from like the original hip-hop ... your Grandmaster Flashes, Soulsonic Forces, Crash Crew, Cold Crush Brothers ... those guys were all together before they even thought of makin' records. So that's why they went side to side and could shine like one. Flash could make the Furious Five sound like one because the vibe had been there for years. They knew each others' strengths and weaknesses.

So what do you think it was about the different styles of rap that made up Ghetto Boys at that time that made it work?

Well, at that time we were still reachin' for what we were tryin' to do. We were tryin' to be commercial. We did what we heard Run and them doin', what we heard the Fat Boys doin'. We was tryin' to be commercial, acceptable, until we found out that that wasn't gonna happen from a Houston-based rap group. So after we did an album called *Making Trouble*, then we did a series of 12-inches. Johnny C did "Be Down," and then that kind of put a split in there because due to the market then and everything that was goin' on ... if you compare the *Making Trouble* album to the first N.W.A. album, you'll see there's a very close ... similar concept-wise. They were touchin' on their type of gangsterism, we was touchin' on our type of gangsterism on there but then the next album's just totally off the chart, know what I'm sayin'? Just totally off to the left. We're talkin' about drug dealin', slayin', havin' sex with headless corpses and all this other crazy stuff, man.

On Grip It! On That Other Level ...

Yeah. On *Grip It* ... Johnny C, Jukebox and myself, we did a whole 'nother album that got shelved because the personnel all quit. Johnny C went solo, Jukebox didn't believe in what we were doing anymore, and I just stayed to reap the benefit from what I put in for the past two years. I lost a whole family behind that album, man. So I figured I'd stay for one more album and see what was goin' on. Then after the *Grip It! On That Other Level* album started sellin', Rick Rubin got involved, so I said, "Finally! Rick Rubin, man ... LL Cool J, Public Enemy, Run–D.M.C., so maybe things will start to get right here."

It's a different game.

Yeah! I was surprised, and I felt honored even bein' in his presence, man. Because Rick is the man. I'm just gonna say straight up—he's the man.

How long was he with you guys on the group level? Was he a presence that was around a lot?

Well, Rick Rubin ... he came over to my apartment that I had on the Northside of Houston, and what had happened was ... he was like, "Okay, I'm gonna change this around, here's your new name ..." instead of the G-H-E-T-T-O name, he came with the G-E-T-O. And when you look at it, it's more commercially acceptable, you know what I'm sayin'? Plus, with him being a Jewish guy ... ghetto actually refers ... it's a Jewish term. So we kinda changed that around. And then took it from there. But as far as what he changed around, he took what I had and he just knew how to engineer it, man, to the point where it just brought it all up. I couldn't believe that was some of the stuff that I actually had off the first album. So it all worked out pretty good, man, but yeah, he put his touches ... on the mugshot album? He put his touches on that.

So that started changing the way—that started changing the way that you thought about beats from there on out? Like when you started making beats after that, after he'd been in there?

You know, actually, I kinda got my props, because after they saw that he didn't really change none of my structures or anything—he just mixed it—then they started seein' me in a different light as a beatmaker. Because I never presented ... I'm not a Dre beatmaker. I wish I *could* make beats like Dr. Dre. I'm a DJ first of all. You know what my thing is? I keep two records on time for my MCs. I can do the live show. How I even got into beatmaking was because there was a record called *Flash Is On The Beatbox*, and I heard Grandmaster Flash could do the beatbox, and that's my number one idolized, groupie worship hero, you know what I'm sayin'? So I just naturally got the progression and then started wanting to make beats, because Grandmaster Flash was makin' the beats. So that's not really been one of my strong fortés, but I did bring something to the table.

Was this when you were still in Jersey, with the Mighty MCs, wasn't it called?

I was just starting to mess around with a Roland 626. A friend of ours—you know, me and Johnny C, we both come up under funk, and Jazzy Bradley was a funk musician in Trenton that kinda put us underneath the wing. And we would go down in the basement and stay for hours while they would rehearse.

So we got to be around musicians. And then one time I wanted to duplicate a beat by James Brown, before sampling James Brown had got popular, maybe like three years before sampling got popular. This would be 1984. I asked him, I said, "Hey, can you play this beat?" And he was tryin' to do it on a Roland TR-707, and he couldn't quite do it. Now, he tells me that I said the beat was whack that he made for me, and he said, "Could I do better?" I said I probably could if I knew how to program. He went in his closet and pulled out this dusty Roland TR-626 and said, "Here. Here you go. Here's the book. Come back." I came back about a week later, had the beat matched perfect. That was before sequencing was coming out, and like I say, my thing was just running on time. I was running the turntable along with the beat machine, so I guess I was preparin' myself for the next step, doing production as far as the sampling. And as a DJ, you can take all the little phrases and elements and everything like that, and just, you know, kind of put it all together.

So were you working with those same tools whenever you got to Houston?

Actually, when I left in January of '87, I packed 50 of the most [popular] records that I could think to—things that I knew I could make a living with as a DJ at that time—and a Roland 909 drum machine, and I just would program the 909. When I hooked up with Rap-A-Lot, we went out and we found a TR-808, a little sound mixer and got some 400s, and none of that is sequenced. On the *Making Trouble* album, that was all bein' tracked when I'm runnin' the records and everything together.

And J put you to work—you had an apartment above his car lot, is that right, over on North Shepherd?

This is what had happened: We was all livin' in a Fifth Ward house, and there was maybe five or six people in there. And, the car lot would stay locked up at night. Now, as a musician, I'm not just gonna let equipment be in there for the takin', you know what I'm sayin'? So one day, I said, "I do not wanna sleep with five or six people in this house, this wild and crazy." I said, "Man, do you mind if I stay with the equipment in the room?" He says, "Yeah, but lemme give you somethin'." So he gave me a Mossberg shotgun and said, "Here, you watch the lot for me." And that's how I started staying up at the car lot.

Being there with your equipment, you probably started getting a lot more involved with it.

I got a *lot* more involved with it. Shit, I'm the type that—I sleep with the equipment, man. Even at my grandmother's when I was young, my grandmother would come into the room, I had headphones wrapped all around me because I'd be sleeping with the drum machine or I'd be asleep at the turntables. She'd say, "Go to sleep!" And I never still, at this time, still sleep at night. I'm always more creative durin' the nighttime process. Something about when you're burning that midnight oil in there at night and you see that sun come up. I was a vampire for years, man. I got a rhyme: "I stayed in my room for days at a time / when I cut the beats and the MCs rhyme." And I'd just stay up in the room, man, and just try to get it right. Get down with your mouth and walk all around with the newest products and the tape. That's how you got your juice back in the day. Up in the lab, as they call it.

What struck you about the rap scene in Houston when you first saw it? Like when you first got down to Houston, going to the club and seeing what was going on, what struck you?

They had this thing called "cappin'," which, I was goin' in there…'cause I'm not a pretty bad MC. Sub-par, right? Back in the day, you know, I could rap. From bein' a DJ, you just pick up on it. So I say, "This is a different region of the United States—let's see what they *do* first." Man, they came out there, started talkin' about mamas, "suck this," "suck that," and that's one thing on the East Coast that you ain't gettin' involved with back in the day, you know what I'm sayin'? And there was one guy who stood out, name was Willie D. And he was goin' against a guy named Romeo Poet, and the Royal Flush. And Willie D could fit any MC's lyrics at that time, but he made them cap rhymes. Like he used to do Dana Dane "Nightmares" and he would come up with something that he'd say, "There's a rat on the couch / and it said 'gimme five' / and his mama look like a hoe / that's why she dyin'," and all this other type stuff, man. And he would win week after week after week after week. They called it "cappin'." So I got used to the structure even though *my* hip-hop is not necessarily *your* hip-hop. And when it spread from more than just the Tri-State area—New Jersey, Connecticut, New York—and it started comin' on down to Pennsylvania, Delaware, Virginia, and it started goin' Midwest, everybody took what they could take, and developed it. But hip-hop, to me, has always been national, all over. It's just that it's not from the original—where it was *created* at. But if you gotta do something ... like everybody was always doin' block parties. There was always DJs in every state that you go to, and they always had people on the mic that was good. They were actually doin' hip-hop but they didn't know that was the term for it. So Houston always had its place with the rap. Since the "Rapper's Delight" came out, man, that was just goin' on everywhere, so there was always people from different regions goin' down to different places that were always there. There's a lot of people from New York there, and the group that I went out with was from Chicago, was DJ Lonnie Mac. You had Burgermeister, who was from New York, Vicious Lee, Jon B from Brooklyn ... so that was my circle. As a matter of fact, I was with them before I became a Ghetto Boy, because we decided to go with Rap-A-Lot as the Def IV.

I was gonna say that sounds like the guys that were in Def IV, which were signed to Rap-A-Lot after you guys, right?

Which ... yes sir, so I told them, "Look guys, let me see what I can do." Because after he—J asked, "Who did the beats?" Well, that was me. And my brother Jon B, he came up there with me, and J was more interested in the beats. So I said, "Look, we gonna do this. Let me get in the door, and when there's an opening, I'll call you," you know what I'm sayin'? And after we got established, J said, "Well, is there anybody else...?" I said, "Well, the group I was with, J, the Def IV." You got the Royal Flush, you got ... "I Know How To [Play 'Em!]" ...

What was her name—the female rapper—Choice.

Yeah, Choice. You had Nate ... what was his name ... his DJ, Boss, just passed away.

O.G. Style.

The Coughee Brothaz—the Odd [Squad]—you know, so we always looked out for everybody that we possibly could, man. The bottom line—if you was on Rap-A-Lot, and you was a Ghetto Boy, your future was secured.

So when did you guys start touring? I know you were going out and hitting all of the South, working your way up to Chicago. When was that?

You talkin' about seriously touring or just—well, our first tour that I remember was right after *Making Trouble* dropped. Harry-O—Michael Harris, Death Row Records—he was a friend of Little J, and he was from L.A. He got us on the Fat Boys "Wipeout" tour. The Fat Boys, Salt-n-Pepa, and Dana Dane. We started off with Ice-T in L.A. We started off in Phoenix, then we went to ... it was Phoenix, it was Tucson, and it was Oakland, California—that's where I met Hammer, the Holy Ghost kid. And we started talking at that time, and that was my first big tour that I ever had been on myself. I don't like that, and our record wasn't even released yet, but, you know, Harry-O was a mover back in them days, man, and he made it work. He made the promoters respect us, give us a lot of good time onstage when we were an unknown act, you know?

How were you received? How were the crowds?

We were received pretty good man! We were received pretty good considering they never heard our sound, man. We were received pretty good for what it was worth at that time. I mean, we *learned* a lot. And if you been in this game for years ... making records is a science. So when we ... we said, "Okay," said, "You know what? We need to change this up." He said it to me like this, and I said, "Why am I hearin' 25 records bein' played on the radio a day with the funky drummer beat?" Because I was like this—pretty much, once somebody else did somethin' with it, it was like, "Oh, I don't wanna use that record. Somebody else did something with it." Why do you think the record is being played? Because they sound similar. Or they have that beat that's unleashed there. Okay, how can I attack this where it's the beat, but it does not sound like everybody else, but you hear that familiarity in there? So I said, "Okay, I'm gonna unlearn what I have learned." A lot of my philosophy, man, comes from Bruce Lee influence and stuff. That was my first idol, you know what I'm sayin'? Hip-hop, to me, is a martial art. It's always evolving, always changing. That's the style of Jeet Kune Do, which is always intercepting, and contracting. Contracting, expanding, contracting, expanding, you know? And I said, "Okay, I'll attack this. I'll use what I need, strip it down, and bring it back up." So then, once I started knowin' the game... my beats got a little bit better, overall the tracks got a little bit better, and they started bein' acceptable and played. That came off of *Grip It! On Another Level.* I think, as an artist, every record is expected to do better because you know a little bit *more*. So the succession of records got us a little bit better than where we were.

Well Grip It... *marked a change, also in the lyricism because that's really when Geto Boys started to get a little bit darker, right?*

Yes. That's when—after, I was tellin' you we had made the album that got shelved. And Willie D became a member of the group. Then we got Scarface and made Bill a rapper, and we started just talking about a little bit more of the dark side.

And that's what turned Jukebox off. He left because of that.

Yeah. Actually, Jukebox wrote the "Mind Of A Lunatic," man.

He did!

He did, you know, and lemme tell you something, man: A lot of people—well, I can speak for our group, man—we all come from good, decent backgrounds, you know what I'm sayin'? We just know how to get dirty when we need to. Jukebox was very talented, he was good in school, but he wanted to find something ... when you are being something that you're actually not—Jukebox had his doubts, man, and he saw a parallel of sittin' with the thieves, and thinkin', "I gotta fuck somebody before the weekend?" That started taking a toll on him, man. It started changing him, man, so he left because of that, and Bill just picked up the parts, you know, and kept goin' on. It was always going to be Geto Boys, just like there was numerous Temptations changes and New Edition lineups and all that. That's just how it happens sometimes.

What do you think brought about that change? What do you think brought the Geto Boys over into that darker kind of territory?

Lil' J wasn't impressed with the last album that we did with Jukebox, Johnny C and myself, man. It was very commercial, and he didn't think that he would take a gamble on that album, man. He said, "Go back and see what's happenin', but I'm not putting that album out." When you tell an artist *that*, and you done put your heart and soul into something, you know—you really gotta take a look and examine what's goin' on, you know, what's happenin'. So everybody just kind of broke camp, and I was there with just Bushwick Bill. And I had started working on Willie D's *Controversy* album, and so did Johnny C and Jukebox. If you listen to Willie D's *Controversy*, "Do It Like A G.O." is on there, with Johnny C and Jukebox rappin'. So it was just me and Bill and next thing you know this guy Scarface was comin' over my house and K-9, who was out of jail now, was havin' a battle over at my apartment. And that's how all that came together.

Who was [K-9] battling?

He was battling Brad Jordan, who would later be known as Scarface. [Thelton Polk, a.k.a. K-9] was an original member of the Ghetto Boys. After he saw what we were doin', and there was a chance for him to come back into the group, then he wanted to battle, K-9. Well, Brad Jordan done blew him out the water, man.

He was DJ Akshen at that point, right?

Yes, he was DJ Akshen at that point, yeah.

What did you think of him? Was that the first time you'd met him?

Brad was brilliant, man. You know, this little guy just kept bumpin' me—you ever go somewhere and this guy just always is there? Like, "Aw, man, I can rap, man." I was like, "Yeah, yeah," you know. And I would hear him, I'd say, "You know what?" I kept givin' him my card. I said, "Look, I don't wanna hear you outside the club. I wanna hear you where I got you in an environment where I can record you." But I was always *busy*. And finally, you know, every time I did hear him, he did drop some bombs, you know. So that's when, to me, if you listen to the "Seek And Destroy?" Brad had that type of delivery, man, where he could have been the next Rakim, the next Kool G Rap, the next Big Daddy Kane. Because out of all them tracks that I like Brad rappin' on *Grip It! On That Other Level*, I like the "Seek And Destroy" over the "Scarface," because that song to me, at that time—well, I'm from the element where you got true MCs, not rappers. And I'm an old schooler. The four elements, you know. That's how I live now—by the four elements. Well, actually, the most *popular* of the four has always been DJing and MCing. You know? That's what you had to do to record yourself—a DJ or an MC. You had to have some skills on the wheels or you had to have some skills on that mic. That's the element that I came up. The ones that I saw comin' up before me, the original pioneers of this craft—the Kool Hercs, your Bambaataas, your Flashes, your Theodores, your Red Alerts, you know what I'm sayin', Hollywoods, all these cats—those are the ones that you're patterning yourself after. Every martial artist that came after Bruce Lee—who do you think the guiding light was?

They look up to him.

They wanted to inspire themselves, you know. I feel that you never become *better* than those before you, because that's theirs. You just take it to the next level. But the basic pattern and foundation has already been set for you. So therefore, the blueprint is pretty easy. If I can read all the notes that you left behind, and I had a structure of your foundation already, of *course* I can add on to it because *now* I'm deep into the foundation of it. I get to see what's goin' on, so I can strip, rebuild, strip, rebuild, bring it down. Good stuff, man. So yeah, you always gotta give homage, man. Every time I put the headphones on, cue up the record, I'm doin' an homage to all the DJs from the past who came up with that. So it's like—they're always going to be a part of you, because that's what they do. That's them.

I know you like "Seek And Destroy" better, but I wanna talk about the "Scarface" track because of the effect that it had on Houston, and the kind of game-changing that a lot of people look back on—I talked to K-Rino about that and he said, "That was the first time I really thought we could do this, like a local act could do this," when that song broke.

Now, first of all, Brad had something out with Lil' Troy at that time called "Mr. Scarface." I heard the record, heard some of the elements being dropped in there, and I said, "Well I can remake that." But a couple years before he thought about that, I've already started doin' my *Scarface* the movie samples. And I said, "You know what? If I employ these with that, and remix this and put that with this, and tell him to call himself 'Scarface,' I think we might have something here." So the only thing I did, man, was pretty much remix that and put "Scarface" on there. John Bido had helped Brad along with that album for Lil' Troy, you know. And ... that was my involvement, but yeah, when that came, it was more than just "Scarface." It was the "Gangsta Of Love," it was "Let A Ho Be A Ho," "Read These Nikes," but I'm just talkin' about just as far as DJ Akshen. To me, that was his best flow as an *MC* on there, where he's just lettin' it go and just cuttin' it up, man, you know, just flowin' off the top.

On the "Scarface" track, you mean?

Overall, I like the whole album. I'm very proud of *Grip It! On That Other Level*. I'm very proud of that because finally, we started goin' all over. We started goin' all over—all over the country. Four guys from Fifth Ward. There was only six of us. There was our road manager Keith ... it was our roadie Steve, and it was the four of us, man. We went to Chicago, Detroit, L.A., all over the country, man. And people said, "Man, we ain't think y'all was gonna come." They told us this in East St. Louis, man, "I ain't gonna mention names, but some of these groups, man, they be scared to come, but y'all came, man. Y'all came man!"

"Man, we're Geto Boys—we're not afraid of anywhere."

Yeah! You know what? Because we went there, and we had a relation because we always kept ourselves accessible. They seen how we came to they town, and we came as guests, you know what I'm sayin'? We never tried to take over. That's why—if you go places, man, cats ain't tryin' to start nothin'. But if you go there with the wrong attitude, you know what I'm sayin', that's when beef starts. I always tell friends, "Now how this guy get killed? Because he was tryin' to do a little something extra." People just ain't gonna—you know, sometimes it happens ... you might just be in the wrong place at the wrong time, but to get killed, and this happen to you, man, it's because there was an opportunity *for* it to happen because you pissed a couple of people off.

A lot of times it is just the little things.

It's the little things, you know. We had some little—some little troubles, man. Sometimes, man, we can't help it, man, if the girls was on us. We can't help it if the "Gangsta Of Love," we didn't know that that would be a signature ... "Ooh, can you do me like y'all do in that song?" You know what I'm sayin'? Me and Bill, we was roommates, and we couldn't believe how much play we got off *that* song, man. Memphis was good to us, man. We had Tony Presley, who was second cousin to Elvis, man, he gave us an exclusive tour of Graceland, man.

Oh wow.

That was very cool, man. We met Isaac Hayes through that.

You guys were in—you were just like in a van or what?

Yeah we were in a van, man! We weren't tryin' to kick it high post back then, man. We did a van, shuttle bus, weekend gigs, you know what I'm sayin'?

Were y'all playing in front of a lot of people every night or was it small clubs?

It would be anywhere from 150 people to 2,000 to 3,000 people, man, in them small venues at that time. We could fill up a club or what I called the renovated movie theaters. We used to be down at the ... Maceba Theatre in Houston? That used to be in Third Ward somewhere, man. We filled that up one time. Yeah, and it'd be astonishing, man, that they would just come in there to see us, man. It was like *wow.* You know what blew my mind? You know how you see the Michael Jackson tour sales they be showin' you, man, and you be like *damn!* Well, one time, man, the guy from Chicago picked us up, and we was goin' to the elevated 'L' station, and there was a record shop—the 'L's are just elevated platforms—and there was a *massive* traffic jam, and it looked like a block party in the streets of Chicago. And we was like, "Man, who is these people here to see?" He said, "Man, that's the people who have come out for the in-store." There were thousands upon thousands of people in the street, man.

In Chicago.

In Chicago, man. Just for us. And I was like, "Wow!"

This is for Grip It! On That Other Level*—that's on that tour?*

Yeah, this is for the *Grip It* ... man, we would go to Chicago every week, man! The promoter at that time—we was workin' with the late DJ Pink House. He was a very popular house DJ at that time, and man, we was goin' every week. We played Harvey, Illinois, we played the North Side of Chicago, the South Side of Chicago, the East Side of Chicago, West Side of Chicago, Gary, Indiana—we just was in the Midwest a whole lot, man, and always loved, man. Always loved. That's one thing that we always showed, man. We always would chill, never a problem, man. Never had any problems, you know.

How much changed, then, once We Can't Be Stopped *came out?*

Well, you know what? That's where I kinda left, man.

After the Rick Rubin thing ...

So you didn't do that tour, then, for We Can't Be Stopped—*did you work on that record?*

I worked on that record. I didn't receive any credit, but I'm the first one you hear on it. "As the year 2000 reached into the free world / a band of lethal assassins ..." And my friend, I tell you what—see how the sound changes on the next album. I didn't get any credit, man, but I'm gonna let it go.

So you left why?

I left because hey man, I'm tired of this funky arithmetic, man.

Yeah.

And it just got to the point, man, where I shouldn't have to be onstage worryin' about my lights being cut off, and yet you buyin' $100,000 Mercedes and all this and all that. And yet, you know, we still struggling. So it was just the kind of point where it was like, "You know what? Forget it man." I walked away. Some people say I walked away from a gold mine, but I actually have no regrets, man.

Well you did good work.

Thank you. 20 years later I have no regrets for leavin' that because it's still goin' on. Still goin' on, and I still can't believe that some people still allow themselves not to have anything, you know?

How do you mean? Because of the arithmetic, you mean the pay?

The pay, not handling to ... even some groups from the '60s, man, went gold and platinum and they still get a nice, nice royalty check. They still get nice publishing checks that they can live off the rest of their lives, things like that. I don't see none of that. So I really don't know what's goin' on now, and I really don't care because I'm not involved in it, but I say, man, as an artist, take care of your business. That way you can feed your family, man.

Do you still keep in touch with Willie?

Me and Willie D, man, we talk like we never left a beat, man. I talked to Face the other day. He was up in New York. He had gave me a call. He was doin' the Hip-Hop Honors. I used to stay in touch with Bill. I haven't talked to Bill in a while. Last time I talked to Bill he was workin' on his gospel album.

Isn't that crazy?

Yeah, well we—Bill was a bible college student, man, when he had first came down to Houston, man, with his sister.

He was in Kansas City or something like that, right?

I'm not sure where he had came from. He was with his bigger brother Chris at that time, but then he got sent to Houston. I kept bein' in the club and something kept like rubbing my leg lower than me. You know, you in the club, you not used to something that low? I was like, "Aw, it's this cat right here." Well, that kinda—me and him kinda hit it off instantly, man. Bill's a b-boy, you know what I'm sayin'? I was a breakdance DJ, so I'd put the breaks on, and Bill could just cut it up, man. He was like my Larry Love, man.

When he and Willie started working on lyrics for him to transition to become an MC, did that happen in the studio, or what was the scenario with that?

Me and Bill would always hang out all day smokin' weed, man. And I would always try to get him to rap and do some things, you know. He was like, "Red, man, I can't rap ..." So I taught him some rhymes that he could rap, but he was like readin' it off the paper. "Bill, instead of you dancin', man, you need to rap." He took to it instantly. He had a unique voice at the time. It was different, you know.

Willie told me a story—I guess it was you guys in the studio, and he took Bill aside and sat down and they had a conversation, and he wanted to talk to him about writing his first rap, and he wrote his first rap with him, which was "Size Ain't Shit." You know, he just kind of got his story down and everything.

Oh yeah. Well Willie D at that time was the true backbone as far as the lyrical content. The only one that he didn't write for was Face ... see, Willie was the only true representation of Fifth Ward. We're all transplants.

Willie was born and raised.

Yeah, see we all fit in, but that's like the Godfather of the Dirty South, man … that's why they try to get with Willie D, because they all pretty much done bit his sound and style, man.

(2008)

Darryl Scott

DJ

Known almost universally in Houston as the one who originated the slowed-down sounds that DJ Screw would later adapt into his own genre, Darryl Scott was the hottest DJ in Houston starting in the late '70s and throughout the '80s. His mixtapes were a permanent fixture in the tape decks of cars driving around Houston as he was parked behind the turntables at the legendary clubs of Ray Barnett throughout their heyday and at the huge parties at MacGregor Park that spawned the L.A. Rapper's 1985 single of the same name. Scott opened Blast Records & Tapes in South Park in 1984 and is lauded by many in Houston's scene as a tutor and mentor.

When was it that you first started DJing?

Probably in 1975.

What were kids listening to in those days? What were you spinning?

It was … it was more R&B, but rap was on its way in. I was DJing before Sugar Hill Gang came out. I was one of the first to introduce it to the city. I was already doin' … what was it … Kool Moe Dee with Doug E. Fresh and all of them … Treacherous Three. I was playing rap before Sugar Hill Gang came out but it really … it blew up once the Sugar Hill Gang kinda hit the airwaves, but I was playing some of that, some Fatback with King Tim—that had some rap in it first. Also quite a few other little things that I was playing at the time, before Sugar Hill Gang came out. Even before they came out with the label I was gettin' a lot of stuff out of New York that was rap-oriented.

White label stuff? People just sending you singles?

Yeah pretty much. I would go down to New York, matter of fact, and go into the stores and listen, test it, try it and buy it.

So where were you spinning back then? Where were the hot clubs? This had to be before the Rhinestone Wrangler, right?

Yeah, yeah, yeah this was before the Rhinestone Wrangler. At that time we was doin' like Superskate—that was a skating rink and there was J.B.'s Entertainment Center on Scott. That was more of a club type of scene. Especially for the teens at that time.

And really that same generation of kids ended up as the first wave of Houston rappers, right?

Of course. I was young at that time, when I was DJing. I was like 13, 14. I was already gettin' into the clubs. The clubs—Big Apple New York, The Screamin' Eagle, all of those guys—they hired me illegally. I wasn't even supposed to be in the club. I would sneak in to those clubs. Grand Central Station, Fantasia 5000. All of those clubs I was DJing early, early—way before I was at a legal drinkin' age.

Were those all on the Southside of Houston?

Pretty much, yeah. Pretty much. I used to ... started a little dance out at a skating rink—Superskate, which was the Northside. I had a huge Northside following. They would come out here when we were doing the MacGregor Park thing—that's what really got the MacGregor Park thing crunk again is that I would announce, I would be out there spinning, outside at the park and that's what got the Northside coming over here. And then the Southside, you know, got wind of it and then they started overcrowdin' it and it just got too jam-packed and I got blamed for the riot.

This is what year? This is the late '70s?

Yeah, late '70s. '78, '79.

Okay so rap music in its early form—Spoonie Gee, the Sugar Hill Gang, Treacherous Three—was being heard in Houston around this time, or was making its way into Houston around this time, but was there anybody in Houston actually rapping?

Oh yeah. We had the South Park rapper—which was Robert—did the song "MacGregor Park ..."

So that's who did that track. That track came out earlier than "Car Freak," earlier than the Real Chill single "Rockin' It," so who was the artist?

It was Robert Harlan. Known as the "South Park Rapper."

But this had to have been too early for these to have been purely hip-hop parties. You had to have been spinning some funk, soul ... maybe disco?

No disco. I was more funk.

More from the funk and R&B side?

Yeah, we was doin' more Gap Band, we was doin' things like Cameo, like Bar-Kays ...

Rufus Thomas? Stuff bleeding over from the late Stax Records era?

Nah ... not Rufus Thomas. They wasn't feelin' that too much. Ray Parker, Jr. you know, anything that had that funk type of ... Lakeside. A lot of Parliament, Funkadelic, Brothers Johnson. And then when Juno came out with "Rappin About Rappin [Uh-Uh-Uh]," Junie [Morrison]. They was onto that pretty much but it was more that funk type of sound. Every once in a while, you know, a little Earth, Wind & Fire.

But the earliest record you can remember coming out of Houston was "MacGregor Park."

Oh yeah.

And what year was that? '83, '84?

I don't even remember, but that was one of the first.

Seems like a lot of people remember "Car Freak" being the first record to really make the circuits, but by my timelines, "MacGregor Park" had to have been before that ...

Oh yeah. That was well before.

That, by the time "Car Freak" really took root, people looked at "MacGregor Park" as having been made by the generation before them.

Yeah. Yeah. Now I would also introduce them to some Thomas Dolby, "She Blinded Me With Science." There were some things that I just kind of ... I cultivated them. Phil Collins, I cultivated them with some Phil. Some Genesis.

He was mixed in with Earth, Wind & Fire, too at that point. Early '80s. "Easy Lover."

Yeah. And they was just really being introduced to something different other than just the black funk artists. I would play the white funk artists, matter of fact came out with a rock ... a black rock classic that had most of those songs on there that everybody ... Peter Frampton. They loved "Benny And The Jets," things of that nature. You wouldn't hear a whole lot of that in black clubs but I would play it. I would break the audience of just being caught in that same old redundance.

What were the clubs like back then? Was there a lot of energy?

Oh man there was a lot, lot of energy. Lots and lots of energy.

So you remember it as a good, positive thing.

Oh, man. It was literally like ... no fights, things of that nature.

When do you feel like rap really took root in Houston, really seeped in?

During the Sugar Hill era, that's when Grand Master Flash and them started comin' out, back to back, Kurtis Blow started comin' out with more things, then Treacherous Three, then the Fat Boys—they were all ... we just had a handful of rap songs we could play—mostly it was R&B and funk but the more rap that came out, the more we were playing things, the "Happy Birthdays" and Freedom. Those things ... "Genius Of Love," Tom Tom Club. When they started droppin' [the group] Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde ... those things started coming out that's when rap kinda really took over from that point and that's when the older folks would say, "Aw, it's just a fad," and it never stopped and just kept growin' and growin' and growin'.

Seems like most of the early rappers from Houston tag Run–D.M.C. as a starting point for them, but everything you reference precedes them by years.

Actually, I used to rap. I was rappin' *before* Sugar Hill Gang came out and that's when it really hit when Sugar Hill Gang came out because they thought that was me. My rap was right off in that area. I would rap to my intro song that I always got everybody crunk with, which was called "Come On, Get Up And Dance," by Freedom. When it would get to that break I'd say my little short rap that I'd put in there and they was very familiar with that. Once Sugar Hill Gang came out with the entire record then they were ... oh man ... they was just really crunk. From that point it was like, "Man! You came out with a record? You came out with a record?" And it was like, "Nooooo." This other guy, Thelton, which was the brother of Lil' James—where James got the name Rap-A-Lot from.

From Sir Rap-A-Lot? Right? K-9.

That was it. K-9. Thelton was rappin', too. He would get on the mic at the skating rink and rap. Right after I started rapping, he wanted to, and he'd find him something that had a break in it and he would start rappin'. So that became a weekly thing as well, but that was before the Sugar Hill Gang had hit the scene.

So this was '79, '80?

Somewhere off in that area because I was still playin' some Treacherous Three and some "Put The Boogie In Your Body" and things like that. Orange Crush.

"The New Rap Language," right?

I wasn't playing that one but I was able to find some stuff before they signed to a major label. I found some stuff on some grey label.

Was K-9 one of the first ones other than yourself that you remember rapping in Houston?

Oh yeah. For sure.

Do you remember his transition into one of the original Ghetto Boys?

Oh yeah, actually I was a part of that. Lil' James would come over and sit and wait for me while I was out doing my thing that I do—I was playing tennis a lot at that time—he would come out and wait on me because he knew that I knew what was going to move the crowd. And he wanted to make sure he got my approval on the thing. And he was the one that let me know that he was about to get ready to form the group and the record company.

Seems like he always looked at it from a business perspective.

Oh yeah. He made sure he got with the top DJs to make sure that they put their ear on things before he decided that he would invest his money and time in it. "Do you think it's going to be something that could move, something you would play and that people would purchase?" He was doing his research.

When do you remember R.P. Cola coming around? More like mid-'80s?

Yeah, it was around in that area. "Cabbage Patch" and all of those things, those guys ... you know, they was looking and paying attention to what other DJs was doing and they started rappin'. Then Captain Jack came out with "Jack It Up."

Do you remember what year that was?

I can't remember but I think it may have been shortly after Sugar Hill Gang.

Seems like early on, before the time of "Car Freak," that Miami Bass would have been popular in the cars?

Not a whole lot. Trust me. During that time everybody had my tapes in their vehicles. And I wasn't putting… there was some Roger Troutman, some Bar-Kays and some Cameo with some rap also mixed in there. When I came out with the tape with Sugar Hill Gang and Freedom and all of those things on there—"Be Bop Rock" and those things on there—they wasn't playing any Luke because I wasn't putting any Luke on my tapes and everybody that knew music… it was just one of those things—if you didn't have a D Scott tape in your deck, you wasn't doin' nothing. You wasn't makin' no noise.

Up through the mid-'80s?

That was actually '79. '79, '80, that's when I started putting customized tapes together.

What year was the infamous boombox incident?

Ooh. That was… I don't know what year that was. That was Michael Price that was doin' that over on Calumet. Where'd you get that from? That information?

I do my research. But I was gonna ask you about that because he…

He was the first one to want to screw everything down by the little screw in the radio. After he would plug it in, I showed him how to turn the voltage down on the motor, but it wasn't quite as slow as he would like, so that's when he was able to get in there and press another screw against the motor—the drive itself—and slow it down just a little bit more. That's where the term came from, "screw."

He passed early didn't he?

Yeah, he passed. He left my shop that night with the guy that killed him.

So the inspiration comes from you…

Yeah 'cause I was only slowing it down about three or four songs, on a few personal tapes that I put together for two guys that really had serious, serious systems in their cars and then everybody wanted them. But I gave real exclusive rights to it for the first month or two before I decided to let it out and give it to everybody. They wanted something different from what I was puttin' out that everybody had access to.

So you did it just by slowing down the voltage on the motor?

No, what I did was like "Fresh Is The Word," which was a 45 but it was a 12" single, by me mistakenly doing it in the club one night, makin' the mix, I had it going on 33 instead of 45, which… everybody really started grooving to it. "Man! Keep it right there, keep it right there, nah I like that!" That and also "If You Wanna Ride The White Horse."

Which Screw later put on one of his tapes.

Well I had that on one of my tapes long before Screw was even…

Yeah it was like a "best of" tape.

Oh okay. Well that was the two that really kinda started it and then I would slow down some other songs with the pitch control but they was songs that was already kind of slow. I did about four songs on one tape and then all the rest of it was at its regular speed. Everybody at that point was playing the four slowed-down songs. But [Michael Price] liked that and once he heard that he wanted to figure out how he could slow everything down. And when he was playing one of my regular tapes at my regular speed, they was out blowing and doing their thing and then when the batteries went down everybody was out there just grooving to it. Then he had got hooked up with Earl—Robert [DJ Screw]—and they was talking about doing that and one day they brought it up to the shop and said, "Man, what do you think about this?" And I'm just like, "Man! What's wrong with this?" And he's like, "Nah, that's how it is." And I'm like, "*Oohhh*, it's like what I did a while back." So they was like, "Yeah, we're gonna do everything…" I said, "Man I don't know if they're going to like *everything* like that." But I did know that was one of my most popular tapes—the one that I sold with those four slow songs on there. But they started pushin' it and started pushin' it and at that time weed became so popular in our culture that everybody wanted everything to kind of balance out because they was smokin' and that made things slower and they wanted to hear that music on the same level that they were on when they were smokin' and drinkin'. So to them it made everything sound so much clearer—the instrumentation in the fast songs you couldn't quite understand because they had the speed… but you could catch every word they were saying so it became an instant hit.

What did you think about Screw, watching him as a DJ?

I had been doing that all along all of those years so it wasn't anything that impressed me. Actually Screw would come up there and he would buy a lot of my tapes and take 'em home and if you look at the Screw documentary *The Untold Story*, his wife said that he would be in there for hours. Nobody knew what he was doin'. He was in there studying my tapes, and he would call me and ask me how'd I do certain things. The chopping back and forward was something that I was doing in '78, '79.

People were into it back then?

Yeah, but it wasn't screwed. It was regular speed. But they loved anything that was doubled-up. I ended up coming up with my Number 8 tape, that was years back—it was called *8 On The Double*. That's when "She Blinded Me With Science" had first came out. That was on there, but everything was doubled up and it was called *8 On The Double* because I had chopped the entire tape.

So you were doing it with two copies of the same record on the tables?

Yeah. That was the only way *to* do it. There was no other way to do it. Choppin' was something I had accidentally come up with when I was trying to… not create a break, but I was trying to extend the song, and it was a beat behind. And while listening to it I heard them repeating the words and that's when I started just going back and forth with it. They was feelin' it.

(2007)

Big Mike

RAPPER · SOUTH PARK

Born and raised in New Orleans, Mike moved to South Park as a teenager and started off as a solo artist before being drafted into the Rap-A-Lot group Convicts in the early '90s alongside Mr. 3-2. The duo went to L.A. to work with Death Row Records' iconic producer Dr. Dre, but an album never materialized, and Mike took an offer to join Geto Boys when Willie D briefly left the group. He went on to a successful solo career after that, which was derailed for several years when he was imprisoned in 2000 on an arson conviction involving the Rap-A-Lot studio. Big Mike began making records again in 2005.

You got any Geto Boys tour stories?

One time, we was in St. Louis … and this was after the show, after we had performed. We all went out to a club in St. Louis, and Bushwick got into it with somebody at the club, some of the locals at the club. And we was jumpin' in the van to head back to the hotel, and the van got gunned down. We were all layin' down on the floor, all in the seats in the van, and they're just shootin' up the van, you know what I mean? That was one crazy incident that had happened. Fortunately, nobody got shot. Nobody got hurt or killed. We made it out there alive. But I do remember that one vividly.

What did Bushwick have to say about it afterwards?

[*laughs*] I mean, what can you say, basically? Everybody at the time was pissed at him. I mean, you can't be out of town … we're on other guys' turf. You gotta respect that. We didn't find out what the argument was about. Everybody was jumpin' off and we was like, "Let's go on and leave, it's time to go." It's not a knock on Bushwick or anything like that. You can't change what you did in the past. We was all a little wild, a little crazy, feeling ourselves a bit much.

And as far as he's concerned, he's 20 feet tall.

Yeah, yeah, that's Bill. But you know, I had a chance to see him recently throughout the years, a few years ago, and we had chopped it up. He's making his spiritual music and things like that. He's really changed a lot from what I can tell. But I understood him. It was a lot to deal with, with the pressure of dealing with the label and the sudden stardom and the pressure that comes with being an artist in the game, that roller coaster ride. So I can kind of understand, because I was a little out of control at certain times, you know what I mean? But we live and learn from our mistakes, and they all add to make us a better person. If you learn from it.

You're sort of a Northside and Southside guy, aren't you?

Southside, man … not to take nothing away from the Northside, but the Southside is the ones that was making the noise first. And you know, in Houston, it's

"Southside." That's what you hear about all the time, because you had cats comin' out doin' they thing from the Northside, so the whole city was gettin' they shine, but for the most part, the Southside was the staple.

Well, you look at Houston, look at a map, and you see how many people came from that area.

That come from that area! Yeah, because on this side of town, we had everything ... Six Flags, clubs ... everything was on this side of town.

You had Carro's, Boomerang ...

Carro's, Boomerang, 929, Jamaica Jamaica ... everything was located on the south side of town. And I just think we had that action at the time, everything was poppin' at that time. But like I say, that's not to take nothin' away from the Northside, it's just that that's where things was poppin' at the time.

And they happened in very different ways, too. The Southside didn't really get their shine until Ganxsta N-I-P signed with Rap-A-Lot and brought the S.P.C. with him. That's when people started finding out, really, about the Southside. People always divide the two, but they don't think about the fact that there's always been a connection.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. And the Southside of Houston is synonymous with music, and that's just the way it is. It's not that I'm trying to claim a side ... that's just how it happened. You look at the demographics and you look at the number of rappers that came up out of Houston, like you say, the majority come up out of the Southside! But the Northside's doin' they thing. You got Slim Thug and Boss Hogg Outlawz and a lot of other cats that's from the Northside that's really doin' they thing now, but they'll even tell you the Southside struck first.

But the Northside laid the blueprint, with Rap-A-Lot.

Yeah, Fifth Ward—some people consider that Northside, but as far as like the artists, the names, the trendsetting, everything was taking off from the Southside.

Do you ever go back to South Park now?

Yeah, yeah, *yeah*! I'm not just from around here, I'm from *down* here, you feel me? I be out there. I mean, that's where all my friends are, the people I grew up with, the people I went to school with. That's where I left it at, where I did my thing at. I'm always out there. My people, they see me. I'm out here. I don't be hanging out on the cut and things like that, you know what I mean? But I'm in and out the city. I'm just like a normal person, you know. I'm not sittin' up on high, you know what I'm sayin'?

The reason I ask is because there really is this sort of South Park mystique ... there's something about South Park that really draws people there.

You know what it is, is that the rappers that was comin' out in Houston that was really makin' a big splash, Scarface, me, you know, we were all representing the Southside because that was the side of town that we're from. Not just South Park in *particular*, just the Southside *period*. Now South Park, that's just a *classic Houston neighborhood*, you know what I mean? It's classic. It was like that before I even *came* down here. I understand it, but I don't know if I could just describe it fully, the whole mystique about it, but it's kind of like Uptown in New Orleans. It seems like it's just where the action *is*, you know what I'm sayin'? If you somebody visitin' Houston in the urban scene, in the urban music or whatnot, you wanna go ride through South Park. "Where the Southside at? Where South Park? Where Sunnyside? Where Third Ward? Where Yellowstone?" You wanna go ride *through* there.

What do we hear in your lyrics?

You can hear where I came from. You can hear my struggles throughout the years. You can hear my hopes for the future. You can hear my care for other people, not just necessarily in the black community or the inner city, but people in general struggling with something. My heart goes out to them because I have had the opportunity to struggle throughout the years with certain things. Coming up as a child, the oldest out of nine kids, with a single mother, watching her struggle to maintain a life for us. Being her helper, gettin' out there on my own. Being out in the streets, wanting to hustle, dealing with that struggle. Because it *is* a struggle. I'm not gonna glorify it. Yeah, I made good money and whatnot, but it was a struggle. It was a dangerous situation. It was an uncertain time for me. Me going to the penitentiary—that was a struggle that I had to deal with, but by the grace of God, it wasn't too hard on me. I was able to get out unscathed. The coming home, not getting the reception that I thought I would be getting, like when rappers go to the penitentiary and they come home…

That was 2004?

Yes, 2004.

How did you get back up on your feet?

You know what, it was just… it was my family, man. My family, they was bein' real patient with me.

(2011)

Willie D

RAPPER · FIFTH WARD

Originally signed as a solo artist to Rap-A-Lot, Will is one of the most famous rappers from the South, and is as known for his solo records (his debut, Controversy, *is widely agreed upon as a Southern classic) as he is for his work with the group that put Houston on the map, Geto Boys. A man of many talents: formerly a political radio talk show host, a professional boxer, and real estate mogul, Willie is as active as ever these days, writing and making music both as a solo artist and with Geto Boys. Interview conducted along with Peter Beste at Willie's home in Houston.*

How were the shows in Europe?

Those things were sold out before I even got there. Man, it was crazy. It was like all these kids screamin', and man they ain't know the words to songs, they was just, "Willie D! Willie D!"

You're gonna start doing more overseas shit now, huh?

I'm already settin' it up. I'm already on it, man.

Where's your next stop?

I don't know yet. We're just talking to some booking agents and promoters, just putting a team together right now.

That's the tricky part.

Yeah, so it's just a matter of … it's all just a matter of going places where people know their market, you know what I mean?

You'd do well in London.

Germany, too. I've been hearing about Germany for a long time. You know, how they're crazy about Geto Boys out there. Wherever Geto Boys work, I could work, you know? And we've never been there. So it's a matter of going to those markets.

Where's the furthest the Geto Boys ever went on tour? Tokyo, right?

They went to Tokyo without me. That was when I left the group. But that was just for a couple of dates and that was it. That was way back in … shit, that was '92 or '93.

Didn't Big Mello go instead of Face?

I don't know, but man that was ages ago. It's a whole 'nother world now. To go out there and see that, man … kids walkin' up to me givin' me "Rodney King" cassettes, 12-inches of "Bald Headed Hoes." Givin' me that. I'm like, "Where y'all get that shit from?" Ebay.

Fifty bucks.

Hell yeah. They pay.

And that's the only chance they'll get to see someone like you perform.

They got a hip-hop movement out there. They got some rappers out there, but they can't touch us. They're nowhere near the quality of U.S. rappers.

They didn't grow up on it in the same way.

Well … I think they been on it for a long time. They've had it, for years and years. I mean, there was kids walkin' up telling me that they been listenin' to me since they was in the kindergarten. You know, so they've been on it, they just didn't look at it like, "This is something we wanna do." I guess it wasn't any type of structure. Nothing in place that they could go and say, "Okay, this DJ spinnin' rap music, or this guy is starting a record label, I'ma get on this." I don't think they looked at it like that. I think it was more of a cult movement in the beginning, and now it's starting to really grow. First of all, hip-hop is in every corner of the world. But it's really starting to grow to where you have people starting to form record labels more often and you got DJs that's just totally dedicated 100 percent to the cause. It just blew my mind, man. It just really opened … because you know, I've been traveling, but to do business. You know, to do real estate and traveling … vacation, like that. I never do shows.

I saw the photos. The ones from Finland.

See, that guy knows his market. The show was sold out like … probably a week before I got there. It's a club. They sold tickets. Sold out. The dude … they knew what they were doing.

K-Rino did well out there, too.

Yeah, so … that's another thing. I know if K-Rino did well out there, then I know I can go out there and do something. They had to turn away like 300 kids, man. That was in the cold, too. It was cold! It was cold, I mean like *cold* cold. I mean like 10 degrees! They were standing out in the cold, and some of them … it was kinda unorganized, though, 'cause some of the kids I heard, they was complaining that they had tickets already and they was in the cold for two hours. But then, they still had like another 300 kids that could not get in.

You'll have to go back again sometime.

Oh, I'll be back next year. From now on, Finland is on the list of cities to do. Another thing is that all of those countries are so close by that you can hit a country and hit two cities in each country. Like Norway would be good because the median income in Norway is $38,000. See, they don't think rappers know this kind of shit. But yeah, they got money in Norway. Everybody got money in Norway. They got *something.* Not necessarily everybody rich, but everybody got something. Ain't nobody really starving in Norway.

You thought about buying land out there?

I hadn't really thought about it, nah. You know, the opportunities I take, man … the opportunities are more like people that I know say, "Hey, this is what's going on …" and they're inside on the deal. They know what's going on. They know. Because man if you don't really just fuckin' all the way *know*, if you ain't in the loop, if whoever you dealin' with is not all the way in the loop and you trust that person that's in that loop … you can get your head knocked off.

There's a lot of stuff that can get in the way of a perfectly good-looking piece of land. Environmental assessments, that sort of thing …

Yeah, exactly. They got some environmental issues in Fifth Ward, too. That's where all those chemical plants were and shit. A lot of those plants that were in Fifth Ward are shut down, been shut down for years.

What kind of plants?

I know one of them … one of the plants, one of the big issues out there is … what's the name of it … that damn company. It was some type of petroleum company. They were takin' they shit and dumpin' it in the ditches and shit.

In Fifth Ward?

Yeah. That was just basically dumping that shit in the drainage.

These were processing plants, then? For oil companies?

Some of them, like Enron, Exxon and a couple of other companies was in on the shit.

So when did they shut those down?

That's been shut down for years. I don't even know exactly when, but it's been years and years.

'80s, '90s?

If it was the '90s, it was early '90s.

How did that affect Fifth Ward?

Man, there's a lot of motherfuckers runnin' around with cancer or dead, but man ... When you're poor, *what can you do?* I mean, most poor people don't wanna do nothing. Most poor people don't even know they *can* do something. A lot of poor people don't even know that that's the reason why they dying. They just think, "Oh shit. I'm dyin'." That's for real, and that's poor *all over the world*. That just happens to be *our* poor. But that's all over the world, man. You don't know. You don't even know that you have recourse. You don't know. And people ain't been educated on fightin' back unless it's some street shit, like fighting your neighbors or beating up ... fighting your family members, killing your best friend. And nobody like ... fightin' the government, the city. "What the fuck you mean, fight the *city?* You mean like ... Houston against *me?*"

When did you first start rapping?

First started rapping ... I was listening to Run–D.M.C. in Fifth Ward in the bottom. My hood. You know what? I think you got a picture of the bottom ... you remember those apartments I told you I used to live in, Kennedy Apartments? That's where I first started rapping.

'83, '84, something like that?

'84, '84. I can't pinpoint it exactly, but it was '83, '84.

You got good really quick then, didn't you?

I had to. A friend of mine ... we used to hang out in the park and *sing*. Not rap ... *sing*. Sing old '70s songs, like Motown hits and stuff. And when I say "the park," I mean either at the park in the neighborhood or in the middle of the apartments was a little park.

Courtyard?

Yeah. We'd hang out there and we'd sing. One day we was listening to the radio and Run–D.M.C. comes on, and my buddy says, "Ah, man, we can do *that*, man. That's Run–D.M.C." I like to describe Run–D.M.C. as *basically complex*. 'Cause their rhymes are like ... the words wasn't really ... there was no real complexity in the words, but the way they put it *together* and made it ... they were able to achieve their own identity through the way they put it together. Everybody couldn't just put it together the way they put it together. But, you know ... I wasn't smart enough to know that at the time. All I knew was that they were rapping using very basic words and very basic verbage, and I'm like, "Shit ... well okay, I think I can do that." So he goes in his house, I go in my house and we agree to come out in an hour with our raps. He came out in an hour. I came out in an hour. He said his rap, and everybody started laughin'. I said *my* rap, and everybody goes, "*Ohhh ...*" And I only had like eight bars.

What was it about?

I can't even remember. Shit was probably just being braggadocios, though, because that's what happened back then ... you just brag on yourself. You the best, ain't nobody else nothing. They're sucker MCs, you're the greatest. That kind of thing. So ... their reaction encouraged me to write more, so I started writing a little more, and then I started getting in contests and challenging people. People would come up to me or come around the neighborhood and we'd battle and stuff like that. So I'm knockin' everybody down and I'm getting more encouraged along the way. In the meantime, I got an amateur boxing career going on, but this rap thing was something that everybody could see me do. With boxing, you know ... I'd go train and it's just you and the other fighters and the coaches, and then when we'd go fight in the tournaments or whatever, we'd go to Pasadena or Austin or whatever ... nobody else around you, your peers don't really get to see you, to get to see you perform. With *this*, this rap ... I could be on the spot and I can impress my buddies, see a chick I wanna holla at, I'ma rap in front of her. Everybody was lovin' it, so that eight bars turned into a verse and that verse turned into a song, and then after I wrote that song I started competing in contests and then I went on and started writing more and more and just goin' on and on and on. So it was a snowball effect like that. Originally, I never wanted to be in a group because I always hear about how all these groups break up and all this conflict in the groups and stuff, so I never really wanted to be in a group. So when I originally signed with Rap-A-Lot, I signed as a solo artist. Myself and Lil' J, we had the same barber, and my barber used to tell me all the time about this dude. We both from Fifth Ward and we got the same barber. We didn't know each other personally. So I would see him in and out of the barbershop but I never spoke to him. And he never spoke to me. I knew what he was tryin' to do. He knew what I was doin'. To be honest, I think both of us some arrogant motherfuckers and neither one of us wanted to take the first step. But my barber used to tell me all the time, "Man, there's this guy, man … why don't you and Lil' J get together, man … you make the music, he got the money, man. You got the talent, y'all put it together and put out an album, man. Y'all sell a million copies and they'll make a movie about it and put *me* in it." That's how it all got started.

Who was your main competition on the other side of town?

Man, to be honest there wasn't no main competition on the other side of town. It was like … Willie D. It was Willie D … my main competition was Romeo Poet. Romeo Poet, man …

He was from Fifth Ward, too, right?

I think Romeo is from Fifth Ward.

I think that's what K said. He said he would see him all the time at the Wrangler.

Romeo Poet manages Popeye's.

In Houston?

Yeah. I don't know which one but he was managin' even way back then.

You know anybody that would know where that was?

I could probably track him down, make some calls. I mean there ain't nothin' but six degrees of separation. So I could probably track him down if I just made some calls and calls and calls but I could track him down. You need to meet Romeo, man. Romeo kept the pressure on me to be good. He made me better. That was my nemesis. Romeo Poet and Royal Flush. In fact, Royal Flush … the first talent show I ever got into, or battle for the mic I ever got into, it was with Royal Flush. They were the big shit in town. It was Royal Flush and it was against Romeo Poet.

Royal Flush the group?

Yeah, who Rap-A-Lot eventually signed. Well, at some point Royal Flush and Romeo Poet—they joined forces. And so I was against *them*. It was me against them and I held my own. I mean I really … Rhinestone Wrangler, which was the just the absolute … probably the greatest club ever, ever in Houston, had a hell of a run. They used to be about five … I'd say four nights a week jam-packed. Beautiful … I mean *beautiful* girls. Fat chick couldn't … fat chick nowhere to be found. This was a bad place.

In Fifth Ward?

Nah, nah. This place was off Main on Murworth. Right there by the Astrodome. They had a club called Grammo's. It became Grammo's years later. Man, that was the club of clubs, period. That was the king. If you want a blueprint for clubs, and to be successful … figure that out. But we used to battle at the Rhinestone Wrangler. The last 13 weeks in a row the Wrangler was open I won every week. I won so much people stopped comin'. I mean the *competition* stopped comin', not the people. People was losin' they jobs. People would come up to me and tell me they lost they job because they stayed at the contest. They wanted to see the contest. The contest would start around two-thirty, three o'clock. This was back when the clubs was closin' at five in the morning. You could sell liquor all night.

What year was that?

It was like '87, '88. [*laughs*] That was the days, man. Vanilla Ice came there. I smoked him about four times. He came there. He used to come every now and then. Like, that's why when I see people talk about ... when I hear people talk about Vanilla Ice, and they talk about how cocky and arrogant he is? He was like that *before* he started makin' records. I mean he'd come up onstage tryin' to look all tough, and he would rap, he would talk all that shit. And it was a two-part contest—the first part was just where you show your lyrical skills off. If you were fortunate enough to be voted into the finals, then you battled where you did rank-rappin'. You'd talk about everybody ... each other mama, talk about what a person got on, talk down, that kind of thing. Diss rappin'. So that's what we did. And they used to cheer for Vanilla Ice to make him get in the finals. He always was in the finals 'cause they wanted to see me wreck on this white boy. And I would bust his ass every single time. I didn't discriminate. I fucked him up like I fucked everybody else up.

Do you remember the most exciting battle you had there?

I remember sayin' when I was battlin' Romeo Poet one night, I said, "You come on this stage and act like you so damn def ..." Nah, I said ... I said, "I see your girl right there ..." His girl was in the audience ... "I know you love her to def / but that baby she had / that ain't yours by yourself!" Everybody like ... the whole club just went fuckin'crazy. But yeah I remember that specifically.

Where else was everybody battling around that time?

That was really the only place where we really did *real* battle raps as far as like a venue, where we actually did battle raps. Rhinestone was *the* place. No other place period. As far as contests and stuff, I used to go to Joe's. I used to get in contests at Joe's on Jensen and Bennington.

Is that still considered Fifth Ward?

Nah, that's Trinity Garden. Yeah, so ... basically, schools, you know, anywhere there was a talent show I'd go.

What are the boundaries of Fifth Ward?

Ah shit man you talking about ... Clinton ... you got Clinton. A lot of people actually consider Harrisburg to be the boundary.

The southern boundary?

Yeah, the southern boundary. Harrisburg, then I would say the northern boundary would be ...

Cavalcade?

Cavalcade, it would be Cavalcade. The eastern boundary would be ...

It goes as far as Wayside?

Not Lockwood ... What's the other one ... uh ... nah, we ain't that far. It's like ... not that far—you're kinda familiar with this shit! Not quite to Wayside, though. Not really quite to Wayside 'cause when you get down that far you're really at Settegast, so it's not really a main street, it's just like past, just right past Lockwood. And I'd say west is Main Street.

Like North Main?

Like North Main, yeah.

We were gonna take a ride through there ...

They ain't gonna fuck with you. Y'all some crime analysts. CSI. Forensic specialists. Forensic photographers or some shit.

Right. Duncan Funeral Home is right there!

See, that's a big misperception. White people always think they gonna get fucked up in Fifth Ward. All you gotta do is just go out in that motherfucker like you ... you gonna get fucked up if you walk out there lookin' like you a dope fiend walkin' the street. But you roll up in that motherfucker with some cameras and shit? They gonna be like *shit* ... One motherfucker actually get the nerve to ask you what you doin', though. "Whatchu doin' there man? You with the magazine?"

What else should we see in Fifth Ward?

Y'all go take a picture of Wheatley High School. That's important. Take a picture of Wheatley. The old Wheatley.

Who went there?

Barbara Jordan, Mickey Leland. Shit…my grandmother, my mama, daddy. E'rebody went to that motherfucker. I didn't. I went to Forest Brook. It's on the Northside, on Tidwell between Homestead and Wayside.

That's where G-Dash is from.

Yeah well we went to school together. They had basketball games there. Exhibition basketball games. Like Swishahouse against Rap-A-Lot.

I went to one of those. Over at TSU.

Yeah, so you got…Wheatley, they just built a new Wheatley. You can see the old Wheatley right next door to it. Right across the street from it is an elementary where I went to school.

Tell us an interesting old fight story.

I'm day one born and brought Fifth Ward. That's what's on my birth certificate. When I was six we moved to Settegast and then we kinda moved around Kashmere Gardens and all of that. Different places on the Northside. And then when I was 15 we moved back to Fifth Ward. So, when we moved back, we moved into the bottom. That's the southern part of Fifth Ward. It's the part closest to Clinton, where the Kennedy Place Apartments is. That's where we moved to. It was a brand new…brand new apartments. Upscale projects. So I get out there, you know, e'rebody wanna test you and shit. So one dude, you know, he a bully and shit. We playin' basketball so you know, he tryin' to handle me real rough, foulin' on purpose and shit like that. So finally I just…at the time I was probably was 150 pounds or something. And I know he was at least 230, maybe 240. And he tryin' to be all rough and shit. I see that he wanna fight, so next time he go up for a rebound I just pick him up and dump him while he in the air and I start whoopin' his ass. After I whooped his ass, I stretched him out and his buddy kinda break it up or whatever. And I go to my house and…I don't run—I didn't run—I *walked* to the house. And I'm inside of the house and a whole mob of people come to my house and he come knock on the door, "T's son, come on out! Tell your son come on out!" So…I'm fittin' to come out with a closet pole to fight 'em. And my mama make me put the closet pole down. You know, she's like, "Nah, you gonna fight 'em. You gonna go, you gonna whoop his ass!" And I'm like *damn*…I already got away. I whipped this motherfucker's ass already. And she gonna make me go back and fight this motherfucker some more? This motherfucker big, know what I'm sayin'? So I'm thinking, "Okay, fuck I ain't got no choice." So I go outside. He put his chin up. When he get close…just close enough up on me, I jab him with the left and catch him with the right, pick him up, do the same thing to him again. I started chokin' him, and I started chokin' him 'til e'rebody just asked me to let him up. "Let him up! Let him up!" I just kept squeezin' 'cause I knew they was on his side, so I was tryin' to squeeze the life outta his ass. So my mama said, "All right, you let him up now. You whooped his ass. You let him up." Man, my mom was fuckin' gangsta. My mama cut up a white man in the '60s. My mama was…my mama was not no fuckin' joke.

So that had a big effect on your upbringing.

Nah, I ain't *see* her cut the man up.

I mean that your mama was hard.

Hell yeah. She hard on me. *Too* hard on me. But you know, my mama was a gangsta, man. She gangsta for real. She'll fuck you up. She was dangerous. For real.

No one fucked with you after that, huh?

Nah, nah I still had a couple more fights. See, the thing about Fifth Ward…a motherfucker don't *believe* you can whoop his ass. And even if he were to *believe* that you could whoop his ass, nobody's gonna live the shit down. Nobody gonna let you live it down, they gonna always fuck with you about it. So, that's when your pride come in. So, either you gonna whoop his ass a second time, or he gonna whoop your ass, or y'all gonna end up with somebody killin' somebody. That's why there's so much killin' in Fifth Ward, 'cause of that pride over nothing. A lot of it is…a lot of it to me is like bullshit, you know…

Empty pride.

Yeah, empty pride. Almost like you proud of the wrong shit, you know what I'm sayin'? So you know, you fight a dude once ... I'm tellin' you, most of the fights I had in Fifth Ward, I had to fight a dude twice. And you can't really get ... ever get comfortable fightin' nobody. I mean, I'll whoop his ass once, and I'll whoop it again, but you never know when that motherfucker gonna pull out somethin'. You don't know if he gonna pull out somethin', somebody else gonna pull out somethin'. People fight dirty in the hood. Nobody fight fair.

They just wanna win. They don't care how.

They wanna *win.* A lot of the time you don't think about the consequences 'til you layin' on the ground bleedin', you know, or your eyes flickerin', or you sittin' behind bars. You know, like, "Damn, I killed him. Had to kill him. Or I coulda killed him, but I didn't have to kill him like *that.* I coulda made a self defense case for myself. But I just went out and walked up him in front of e'rebody ... POW! POW! POW!" A buddy of mine named Rocky, he robbed ... well we'll put it like this ... they *say* he robbed the neighborhood club, right? The owner shoots him, up by his eye, fucked him up real bad, right? Not by his eye ... by his neck, fucked him up real bad. So about a week later, two weeks later, he was out in the neighborhood sittin' on a bench, he's like, "Yeah Willie, I'ma kill that motherfucker, man. I'ma kill him. He ain't have to shoot me." I ain't *robbin'* a motherfucker! He *robbin'* somebody, and he say, "He didn't have to shoot me." So, yeah, dude shoot him. And he sittin' on the bench, he telling anybody that would listen, he say, "I'ma kill that motherfucker. I'ma kill him." Probably about three weeks later, he catch him at the corner store, or across the street from the corner store. So, the difference between me and some of these guys is that ... I just didn't get caught, you know? I just did not get caught. Or I left early. I ain't return to the scene. 'Cause I coulda easily been in jail, or been one of those dudes dead, too. That's why ... I never could understand why ... you know how people say, "Don't return to the scene of the crime?" You know how they say that? Fuck not *return* to the scene—*leave* the scene of the crime! You know, we got dudes in the hood that fight each other, try to kill each other, beat the shit out each other and then'll stay there, and let somebody *leave* and go do whatever. It's like, "I don't give a fuck. Let 'em go get somethin'." It's like most of 'em don't even be thinkin'—they don't be thinkin' that, "Oh, he gonna come back with a gun and he gonna kill me." They be thinkin' ... "Oh, I'm just gonna kick somebody's ass." You know, in the black community a lot of times, historically we've been raised to settle conflicts with fists and guns, and more so than guns, just fists. It's just, you know ... whoever strongest, that's the one that's gonna win, you know. Whoever is physically strongest.

Not necessarily who's right.

Exactly. It's like whoever is physically strongest, that's the guy that everybody look up to, and so you think just because you strong and you got muscles and shit, you gonna fuck somebody up. And so you sittin' here just like, "Ah, I don't give a fuck. I ain't goin' home." 'Cause you tryin' to ... you tryin' to ... you *proud,* and you don't want anybody to feel like you leavin'. So, you gonna sit there, he gonna go home and get somethin', and you gonna let him come back, he gonna kill you, and he'll be out of jail in five years. Or less. He might not even go to jail because they gonna say it was self-defense. 'Cause don't nobody give a fuck about two niggas in the hood. They got more important motherfuckin' shit to worry about than two motherfuckin' niggas over here killin' each other. And then, both of them probably had criminal records anyway so they don't give a fuck. That's the way I look at it, man, is that you gotta ... another reason that I'm still here is that I love the shit out of *me.* I love life. When you don't value life and you don't think about bein' 60, 70-years-old, gray hair and grandchildren and shit, you most likely ain't gonna see those kinda days. 'Cause you livin' day to day, just goin' through the motions. You ain't thinkin' long-term. You thinkin' livin' in the *now.* So you gonna end up goin' to the penitentiary for a bunch of years and you gonna end up in a grave. You gonna catch an early grave. That's what's gonna happen. So, when I started really thinkin' about it, I say, "Okay, motherfuckers is *dyin'* around me. All around me motherfuckers is gettin' killed for *real.*" Okay. I got to get the fuck... first of all, get the fuck up *out* of here, and then also... I gotta learn to stop frequenting places where motherfuckers get killed. Somebody else gonna get killed, yeah. Man, there's clubs in the neighborhood that's been closed and opened for years... between killings! And people still go to the club! Somebody get killed, maybe once every two months, sometimes once every other week, then it cool off and a couple more people get killed. But the places stay open. Any respectable club, anywhere else, where they payin' taxes, shit like that, payin' liquor taxes, shit like that... they'da been closed down by now. That's too much heat from the government. They'll shut that shit down. But in the hood it's just... bring your own bottle... to them it's like a little quicksand contraption. You know, fuck it. Let 'em kill each other.

(2007)

Romeo Poet

RAPPER · NORTHSIDE

One of Houston's earliest rap artists, his name always comes up when the conversation turns to the legendary Rap Attack contests held at the Rhinestone Wrangler in the mid-to-late '80s. Briefly a member of Royal Flush, he was one of few rappers to give Willie D a run for his money in those contests. He now resides in Dallas, where he owns several restaurants and makes reggae records.

I talk to Willie, he says, "Man, the coldest motherfucker I ever saw was Romeo Poet." Your name always comes up in those stories, so I've been wanting to talk to you for a long time.

That's real, man. That's why—you know what? First, I'd like to give props to Willie D, because he the one of the guys from the old school, man, you know... I mean, I don't like to toot my own horn, but he's the one of the guys, man, he had like a big thing with Special Ed, and all these cats from New York... he never forget where he came from, man. He's one of the cats that always gives credit to me as far as bein' one of the pioneers of this thing, you know? And I appreciate cats like him keepin' it real. Him and Bun B, you know?

Yeah, they really do, because they know where they come from and they understand the importance of educating the newer generations about that, and really making sure, "Hey, everything that you're doing, everything you're hearing has a root somewhere, and there's a reason that everybody that you're listening to developed the way that they did." And that's one of the things that Willie says, "Man, you know, the reason I developed the way that I did was because I had to battle Romeo Poet."

Yeah. Yessir.

So when did you start? When did you start rapping?

I started back in 1985, man. Forest Brook High School. Forest Brook is on the Northside, off of Tidwell.

North of Fifth Ward.

Yeah, exactly. Yes.

Homestead area? Is that where you're from?

Homestead, yes. Scenic Woods.

So what was it like back then, the neighborhood?

The neighborhood... Forest Brook was a lot different than it is today. You know, it was more... like I say, with the music, with the hip-hop scene, that's when the whole neighborhood was actually starting to change. From, you know, bein' involved in a lot of other crazy stuff like gangs and all that? When the hip-hop era came along, it was like the ... the Renaissance. A change in everybody. That's when Run–D.M.C.'s music was just coming out, and a matter of fact, man, Willie D was at the same high school. We was over at Forest Brook, and that's actually how we had met each other, is that we used to battle on The Brook. It's like a little passageway, a little bridge that goes across the school, that connects both sides of the cafeteria with the building. And we used to meet on The Brook and *battle.* During lunchtime. That's how it actually started off, before we got into the ... the *big* scene of the clubs and all that.

Yeah. So he was already rapping at that time, too. Were y'all in the same grade?

Yeah. Same grade. Seniors. From that point, I mean, the high school, the next level came and we left the high school. I was the first one to go to the Rhinestone Wrangler. I'm sure you probably hear Steve Fournier's name a lot, right?

Oh yeah. Big time. He was already DJing at the Wrangler at that point?

Yes, he was DJing at the Rhinestone Wrangler. Him and Big Steve.

Wow. And so—how long had the Wrangler been open at that point?

The Wrangler—when I started goin' there [mid-'80s], it was already open, so I think maybe like a year or so. Like a year or so.

And their format—was it all rap or what else would they play?

No, it wasn't *close* to rap. That's what the crazy thing was. In fact, there was very little rap. And the thing was—this was the crazy part: It started off like a talent show, where ... at the end of the night, like two o'clock in the morning when they stop sellin' drinks? They used to have this thing called the ... "The Rap Attack Contest." This is how it all started, and we used to go there and compete on Wednesday nights. As a matter of fact, though, when I heard about it, before Willie D went, I was the first one to go. You probably heard of Royal Flush, right?

Of course.

Royal Flush was the group that used to rule the Rhinestone Wrangler when it came to hip-hop. So, a couple of friends would tell me, "Hey man, you *good* at rappin', but you need to *really* see how good you are. You need to go to the Rhinestone Wrangler, enter the Rap Attack Contest. On Wednesday nights." The Rap Attack Contest was—well, *first,* you would do something that you actually made up, and then at the *end*, the crowd would pick out the best rappers and you had to battle against each other, freestyle. Off the top of their head. And *that's* how it all got started. So I started off battling the Royal Flush.

The whole group?

I used to battle the whole group, and I won for like probably like three months straight, man! Every Wednesday I won for like three months straight. And after that we all became pretty close. I ended up joinin' the *group* Royal Flush.

You did really?

I joined the *group* Royal Flush, yes. So me and Rick [Royal], you know, to this day we're real close. But, we started off battling each other, and we battled so much, we became good friends. And the reason they asked me to battle, Rick said ... he just shared this with me like about a year ago. He said, "Man, you want to know why we really asked you to join the Royal Flush, man?" He said, "Because nobody had the guts enough to get on the stage and rhyme against us." He said, "You was such a small dude, I said, 'Man, this guy got some balls.' And you were out there and you was just freestylin', and talkin' all that noise, to guys that are three times bigger than you, man." I was really small, man. And he said, "That's what made us ask you to join the Flush, man." 'Cause he say, "This little dude got heart, man." So that's how I ended up joinin' the Royal Flush. But from the Royal Flush, Willie D came on the scene right after that. That's when Willie D came along and he started battlin' against the Royal Flush. And he came and won like probably a month straight. You know how crowds are—once you been winnin' for so long, somebody new come along, something fresh and new? Willie D came in with the ... with the Fifth Ward style, you know? And that's when *we* started battlin' each other. So it kinda went back and forth, and the Rhinestone was like ... sometimes I would do my solo against Willie D, sometimes he would battle against the Flush, and it was just back and forth, man. But the Rhinestone Wrangler was the birthplace of it all.

So that was like '84, '85, something like that it opened up?

'85, '86. Mmhmm.

So if their format wasn't rap, what were they playing?

Well, they were playing a *little* rap, but let me tell you what the craziest thing about it was: when they *first* started doin' the Rap Attack, they hadn't been introduced to people usin' profanity, and underground language. They were playin' like the *clean* rap version. So when we get to the rap contest, Big Steve was the manager of the club, Steve Fournier was the DJ. But *he* was the only DJ that had guts enough to actually let us get up there and do it. Because, you know, he would actually like it. Big Steve used to say, "Y'all can rap, but no cussin'." But he come to find that, that's what actually drew the crowd to the Rhinestone Wrangler, was the Rap Attack Contest. People would come from everywhere—all over town, North, South, East and West—just to hear the Rap Attack Contest. But when we first started off, Big Steve would say, "Y'all can rap, but no cursin'." Whenever we cursed, he used to turn the microphones off. Every time we used profanity. But it got so big, man. When the people started comin', that's actually what made that club, man. What actually set the whole hip-hop scene in Houston is because the Rap Attack Contests. People started coming from all around just to see it. You know, people come from out of town, everybody in Houston say, "You gotta go to the Rhinestone, hear the Rap Attack Contest."

That was Steve Fournier's thing? He was putting that on?

That was Steve Fournier, exactly.

Did you know him at that point? Before?

I never knew Steve Fournier until I went to the—in fact, I was underage. I couldn't even get *in*. The only reason they would let me in was because I could rap, you know? Because you had to be 21 then. I couldn't even get in the club. I was like 18. Just making 18. And like I say, Steve Fournier ... I used to get ready to go to the club, I used to call him in advance and say, "Tell Steve to come to the door." He would be the one to come get us in the club.

He would just come walk you in.

Exactly.

So who else was showing up to those, then, if Royal Flush was coming in there beating everybody, who was it?

A female rapper by the name of Cinderella. She was known. Lester "Sir" Pace—he a DJ personality.

Kidz Jamm.

Lester "Sir" Pace, Wickett Crickett ... Big Mello. Of course, Big Mello wasn't out on the scene, but they used to just *be* there, hangin' around. Jazzie Redd ...

Ezzy-E—O.G. Style? He would come out then, huh?

Ezzy-E, Jukebox from the Ghetto Boys, they used to be there. All the original Ghetto Boys, they used to hang out there. Lil' James used to be in the club. As a matter of fact, that's how me and James got real close back then.

Because he was always at the club, huh?

Lil' James used to be at the club, yes. Lil' James from Rap-A-Lot ... Casanova [Crew], well that's like—Lonnie Mac was a DJ personality. You know, a lot of people knew Lonnie Mac, too.

He just died, didn't he? A couple years ago.

Exactly. He just died a couple years ago. He used to have a group called Def IV.

Oh he was in Def IV. That's right. Tell me what you remember about Lonnie Mac.

Lonnie was one of the cats from New York, who actually started bringing New York flavor to Houston. He was one of the pioneers of that. Him, the Royal Flush—of course they were from Jersey. Rick Royal was from New Jersey. East Orange, New Jersey. Lonnie Mac—he's the first one who start bringin'—when people start bringin' the 1200 turntables? Remember when they didn't have them down here? He was one of the guys that used to be exportin' 'em from New York down to Houston.

Oh you couldn't buy them in Houston, huh?

Exactly. You couldn't get 'em in Houston. So he was the first—one of the first guys to bring the 1200 turntables here.

How would you get yourself psyched up when you go in and you start battling? That freestyling, was that—were you writing rhymes at that point or were you a freestyler, that was your thing?

You know, to be honest, the coldest thing about it is because I was freestylin' for the longest but I never got into the act of *competin'* against people until, like I say, some friends of mine—we used to go to the skatin' rink all the time, and they'd say, "Hey, man," they'd say, "I'm tired of doin' all this little boy stuff. We need to go to where the *grown* folks hang at, man." They say, "You say you're a rapper, you need to go ahead and try your skills out at the Rhinestone, man." They say, "There's a group named Royal Flush and stuff, man. That's how you can tell how good you are." You know, everybody in my neighborhood, man, used to say, "Romeo Poet, man? I don't think nobody can beat this guy rhymin'." So, that night when I went up to the Rhinestone, that was my first time actually just *battlin'* somebody, you know? And that's how my battlin' skills actually started, right then and there. I used to be in the neighborhood doin' it, you know, in front of a lot of a *friends*, you know, but in front of crowds? That's the first time it started, at the Rhinestone Wrangler, and I went against the Royal Flush. I used to wear like python boots and Polo shirts, so I was freestylin' about stuff like that, right? And we just started rankin' on people. You know, we used to talk about ... you know, nowadays you can't do it, but we used to talk anything, about people's *moms*, what they had on, everything, man. It was anything goes.

Anything somebody was wearing was fair game.

Anything they were wearin', talk about their family, talk about *anything*, you know. The good thing about it is, though, it would never turn out violent, you know? It's not like just—if *anything*, people would be afraid to come up front, because they knew, "Hey, these guys will talk about me tonight, if I be up here." Oh, we would talk about people in the *crowd*, people on the *stage*, just anything, you know?

All good-natured.

It was all good-natured, and people used to get—like I say, people came in from ... as a matter of fact, Northside, Southside, they didn't mix too much back in the day. And that's what started the different sides of town mixing, because people started comin' from all over when they heard about the rap contest, what was goin' on. So people from the North, South, East and West, two o'clock in the morning, whether they were workin' or what, everybody knew when you get off of work, or whatever you're doin', when they stop sellin' alcohol, two o'clock in the morning, the rap attack contest starts. The club would stay open 'til like five.

Wow—so it would last hours then?

Yeah—after hours. It used to be between two and five thirty in the morning. It was all rap, and that's what people were coming to see, whether they go to school the next morning, or they had to be at work the next morning ... people used to come and pack that club. And guess what? It was on a Wednesday night. It wasn't on a weekend. It was in the middle of the week, on a Wednesday night.

Willie D said people used to lose their jobs because they were staying there so late.

Exactly. They sure did. I knew a lot of people lost their jobs, people failed school, everything.

How many people do you think that club fit?

Oh—Rhinestone? Capacity probably was ... capacity was probably like up to 800 people I would say, but that club used to be so packed, man, there was every bit of—there used to be over 1,000 people in that club, easily.

On a Wednesday night!

On Wednesday night, yes. I mean, people parked all on the median, in front of the club. If I could think of the street, man ... I'm tellin' you—it used to be crazy, though.

Do you remember the first time that you heard a Houston record being played in there? Did that ever happen while it was still in that location?

The first time I heard a Houston record, I think it was the Royal Flush. You know what? As a matter of fact, I take that back. You know who it was? It was ... what's his name ... Raheem! Raheem, the album, that's a first time I heard a Houston record played, was Raheem. I turned on the radio ... "I turn on the radio / to hear the rappers go / to try to beat me / and neither will they grow." That song there. That song that he did off a mix off a Curtis Mayfield song.

I talked to him, too. I talked to him about those days because he had that first major label deal, but then he did—he was mixed up with Lil' J back then, too.

Right, exactly. And the crazy thing, too, is that another thing to add to it—you probably think that when Scarface came out, he was originally with Rap-A-Lot, right?

Nah, he was with Lil' Troy.

Lil' Troy—so, me and Lil' Troy, we go way back, too, because me and Lil' Troy was actually down with the same label, before all this happened, too.

Oh really?

I kinda had a chance to rub elbows with everybody. Yeah, Lil' Troy, when he had Short Stop on the Southside? I was actually rollin' with Lil' Troy, then, too. So, me and Lil' Troy, we got ties that go way back, me and E.S.G., we go way back—because we were kind of like, affiliated with all the same people, you know? Slim ... Slim is actually the one who used to work with Perrion Records, the label that E.S.G. was first on, Perrion? That's the first label that Steve Caldwell ... that's before he actually signed a nationwide deal, the major distribution deal, though. It was Perrion.

And that was a Houston label?

That was a Houston label, yeah.

So was R.P. Cola already on the scene at this time?

Oh—yes, R.P. Cola was at Rhinestone. I can't leave him out. You're right.

So Steve was spinning during the rap ...

Steve [Fournier] was the main DJ, yeah, and R.P. was there as well, but Steve was like the main one, and R.P. was his partner.

Were there other clubs around town or was the Rhinestone that main one that was ...

There was other clubs, but the only club we ever went to was Rhinestone. Yeah, there was a lot of clubs around, but, you know—that was my first time ever even going *to* a club. Shit, I was 18-years-old, man, so I mean ... first of all, I couldn't get *in* any other clubs, and that was my first time even going *to* a club, when I went to the Rhinestone Wrangler. And then only reason I got in it was because, like I say, I could rap. And it was part of the entertainment part. They knew that the Rap Attack Contest—I'd show up for that. I used to not get there until like 11 o'clock, 12 o'clock. I'd show up right before the Rap Attack Contest. One o'clock, you know.

Perrion Records—did you release a record with them?

Uh, no I did not—as a matter of fact, see ... this is the thing with me, guy, and this is why I saw I just like ... for some reason, my thing was always I was on the side. I was watching a lot of artists make a lot of mistakes, first of all. And me, myself ... versus just sayin', "Okay, I wanna go sign with this label—they wanna put my album and this label in." I was always like a student of the game, man. Had the skills, but just always just ...

I would just sit back waitin' patiently, man. But I used to see a lot of people make mistakes, you know. The only person that I really was *going* to sign with was Lil' James from Rap-A-Lot. James, he did the thing he did first with Royal Flush… Royal Flush came out as a *group* first. And I didn't *sign* with Royal Flush. Back then, that's when I was seeing… I saw a lot of people get burned, and signing—that's when they was just like, rappers was just signing just to get a contract, just to say, "I have a record out." And I always—I was one of the guys that always said I didn't wanna just be in that position sayin' I had a record out. You know, rappers were gettin' robbed *blind* back then. Everybody was sayin', "I got a record, I got a record out." But you know, until recently, probably like maybe what… 10 years ago? You just started hearin' about rappers in Houston gettin' major, major deals, you know? But back *then*, that's the only reason why I didn't sign with Rap-A-Lot, because Royal Flush was the first group that committed to sign with them. And by that time, you know, we had broke up—Royal Flush. We didn't break up on bad terms, but I said, "Hey, you know what? I'm not ready to sign with a label yet." They went on and signed with Lil' James.

That just wasn't the path you wanted to go down.

That just wasn't the path I wanted to go, and I guess, you know, things happen for a reason.

(2012)

Matt Sonzala

WRITER, RADIO HOST, PROMOTER · AUSTIN

Matt's involvement goes back to the late '80s and early '90s when he interned at a Houston recording studio during the making of the Geto Boys' 1991 classic We Can't Be Stopped, *and through his radio program Damage Control and his longtime blogs HoustonSoReal and AustinSurreal, he has brought Houston artists to the airwaves and beyond. In recent years, he has been instrumental in expanding the international careers of several Houston artists—Willie D, Devin The Dude, and K-Rino among them—by arranging European tours and connecting them with promoters to take their music worldwide. Working with Austin's South by Southwest festival over the last decade, he also helped bring Houston an industry recognition that had long been missing. He now hosts a radio show on KAOS radio in Austin.*

When you first started going to rap clubs in Houston in the late '80s, what was the vibe?

I don't remember being shocked that nobody really noticed me. It wasn't nothin'. At first, I was like, "I can't go to this by myself..." some dumb, white 17-year-old. Literally. 18-year-old... I don't even know if I can get in, you know? But they didn't give a fuck. Those type of clubs—it was just kinda wild. At first, I was totally nervous, like, "I can't go to some club like that by myself." And people would straight up tell me I better not go. And it was pretty wild and stuff, but nobody gave me any shit, ever. I would just be there, pretty much by myself, too young to drink, stupid enough to think that it really was going to start at 10... standing around, by myself, literally, for four hours until the show would start at two—or *after* two—or not start at all. And those shows were 15 minutes at the most. And I went to some shows that were legit, and there was a bunch of different artists on them. They were cool, but... I mean, Brand Nubian played The Palladium. A Tribe Called Quest played The Palladium. De La Soul played the Rhinestone Wrangler before—that was before my time. I was still in Erie at the time. But I mean, De La Soul—Dante Ross was with them, they played the fuckin' Rhinestone Wrangler, dude.

Who were the first rappers that you met?

Well, my big break was... I was at a school for audio engineering, and one of my teachers was Jeff Wells, who owned Sound Arts studios, and at that school, it was really a bunch of fucking heavy metal dudes and... not like everybody, but mostly. And I liked heavy metal, too. I liked punk rock and all that shit, but people were like shocked that I knew so much about hip-hop or whatever, and they would always make a point of that. And one of the teachers was like, "Yeah, you really like this stuff, huh? Well, you know, we've got the Geto Boys—they're going to be recording in my studio." And this is like six months before they recorded *We Can't Be Stopped*. And I was like, "*What*?" And he was like, "And I need an intern. If you want to intern..." "*Fuck* yeah I wanna intern!" And literally it took for fucking *ever* for them to start recording their album, but I started going out to Sound Arts, helping out. And like, I was interning there the whole time they did *We Can't Be Stopped*. Doug King's production in the front—he had a little studio in the front, and he did all the pre-production there—then they came and did all the vocals and mixing and stuff inside. I was there the whole time, so ... I did not buddy-buddy up with everybody. In fact, Bushwick was the only one who would randomly remember me in places, like he'd say hello to me. Willie D and Scarface never remembered me or gave a fuck. J Prince, he was there every day. To this day, I was introduced to him for the millionth time at SXSW this year and he was like, "Oh, nice to meet you." I've interviewed him, I've talked to him so many times, and some Rap-A-Lot guy was like, "J really wants to meet you, man. What you've built here at SXSW, man—he's really impressed."

[Geto Boys] were never in there together, then—no?

Never. No. I mean, *rarely*—one or two times, they were there because J had them to meet about something, or whatever. Willie D, you know the whole, "We're gonna kick down the door," and all this. Willie D and me had a straight up argument because nobody was there from the studio *except* me, and Jeff would say things like, "Make sure they stay in line, man." I'm like, "What the fuck am *I* going to do?" And Willie D's like, "Man, we gotta break down the door! We need the sound realistic!" And other people in the studio were like, "Well, we'll find a sound effect. We'll make it ..." And he's like, "Man, we gotta kick this shit! We gonna break the motherfuckin' door down!" I'm like, "You can't break the door! I mean, these are studio doors, soundproof door, all this shit, this is going to throw off your recording to break this door down." "We'll pay for the door! We'll fix the motherfuckin' door! What the fuck, man? We'll pay for this!" And J Prince is just sittin' there. I'm like, "J, please ... somebody say somethin'." Like, this dude's ... I'm a fuckin' intern, I'm here, this dude—this was before cellphones, too. I couldn't just call Jeff, "Hey, get over here." I'm like, "Dude, you can't just break the door down. If you wanna break the door down, give it a couple of hours until Jeff is here, and tell Jeff. And he can make that decision. I ain't makin' that decision, man!" He was like, "Man, what the fuck!" And he did *not* break the door down. But I was like, "Dude, come on ..." Man, it was a fuckin' experience, dude. And that was around the time Bushwick shot himself. It was nuts. It was nuts. Ready Red was gone. I was always like, "Where the fuck is Ready Red?" Nobody really knew what was up.

He was in the process of quitting at that point, wasn't he?

Oh he pretty much already had at that point. It was pretty obvious.

He's on the first track of that record.

Yeah, but that's it. He didn't really participate in much. Pre-production.

The record came out in July, but in May, when Bushwick shot himself, were they still working on the record? Were you still around them at that point?

I was definitely around, yeah. But I think the record was pretty much done, and had released "Mind Playing Tricks" I think around then? And the "Mind Playing Tricks" video was shot out there, too. I saw all that stuff firsthand.

Where did they shoot that?

Over on the Northwest side, by Sound Arts studio. A lot of it was shot over there. Like, the main stuff—the nighttime and all that were all over there.

So you must remember when you first heard about it.

Yeah. It was nuts, dude. It was real nuts. I was there. I saw the vibe. They are crazy motherfuckers, straight up. They are genuinely crazy. It's not an act. They all have issues. Willie D is the most stable one out of all of them, and that's crazy.

When the tape was rolling, did you feel like you were really hearing something special?

Oh yeah. Definitely. But I was more geeked out. I didn't know that that album was going to be as big as it was. They were already pretty big as far as controversies and stuff went. That was the record that put them over like more acceptably musically, and to be honest with you—no disrespect to anyone, but I felt like they were less aggressive on that album than they were on *Grip It! On That Other Level.* I felt like they slowed it down.

That's the way the music was going anyway.

It totally went that way. But I mean, all the upper echelons of Houston rap were there in some capacity, from those days. And the people who became architects of that stuff—Bido and those type of guys were all around, man. 3-2—he was always ... put it this way—anywhere I ever went in those days, I saw 3-2. I didn't know him personally like that, but 3-2 was in *every event.* He was in the Convicts, but ... he was just everywhere, man.

Did you work with the Geto Boys in any capacity again following that? Was there a continuation?

I never worked with them again. I never really *worked* with them. I mean, I'd see them around. I interned for the radio station—The Box—for the first two years The Box was around.

If you were trying to explain the fan bases in Houston to someone, the sides, how would you sum that up?

Well, the local stuff ... what I always liked about Houston was that Houston people always supported ... hip-hop wise, they supported themselves—each other—completely. You know like the Southside sound and the Northside sound, like the Southside and the Northside had their fans. They had real fan bases. They really did make the sounds of their streets, and the stuff that was happening in New York and all of that didn't really make a big difference to them. It wasn't really their thing. Until The Box and things like that became really commercial, and kind of lost that edge. For a lot of years, that shit was *their thing,* so a lot of the regular folks in the hood, they had *their thing,* straight up. And then there were plenty of kids who also—you know, whether they liked the stuff in the hood or not, you know, they liked Gangstarr and they liked De La Soul. They liked hip-hop from other places, so I think there were some people who kind of were limited in their scope—both sides, I think, are actually limited in their scope, like there were a lot of kids who kind of rejected the local stuff because they felt like there was more out there or whatever. And then there were local people who rejected the other stuff because they didn't really give a shit about it. It was really way out of their realm, and that shit happened everywhere. You know, New York people didn't care about anything except for what they were doing. The West Coast made their own thing. And it's sad that some of that's kinda changed. As the perspective should have gotten wider, it's gotten more narrow I think. With the commercial stuff—people just going for whatever. Back then it was such a new culture, it was kind of dynamic. So like the Houston stuff sounded like *Houston,* and it was what it was. Even though it had a West Coast influence, you know, the people in the hood—none of us had internet and cellphones and all that, so they just had what was happening around them. And there was some pretty dynamic stuff happening.

And there were two communities, really, connected to different things—the ones that would be turned on to something like Gangstarr, and then the guys who didn't give as much to the music but wanted to be creative in their lyrics and go hard. The more Southern guys. A different approach altogether.

Right. I mean, that's true—I think ... one thing I'll say is that the community into Gangstarr and all that was a much smaller community. There wasn't a big community at all, *and* as far as Run–D.M.C. and all that goes ... well, take it even further—those guys in the hood who may or may not have been listening to Run–D.M.C., they were listening to Zapp, and Maze, and The Band. And the bayou stuff that came from Louisiana and all that. Talk to Wickett Crickett ... in those days, there was definitely a big community of people who were really into old school stuff. You know all them Southside guys—K-Rino and all them told you I'm sure many times that they original hip-hop stuff was straight up *dance.* You know, and you would go to the club to dance. You were dancing to *bands.* Not that there were no DJs, but before there was Geto Boys and all that shit, Houston was going out to see these funky bands.

(2012)

Top Dog

RAPPER, AUTHOR · SOUTH PARK

Best known in the music world for his work with the South Park Coalition and his solo album Slam Dunk'n Hoes, *he is a former pimp and recent author, having published the book* Deep In The Mind Of A Pimp 2000 *in 2008 under his real name Alvando D. Ray.*

Where were you in the mid-'80s? Were you in South Park?

Yeah. I was beatboxing and doin' a little rappin' over there, but I was…I was more of a beatboxer than I was a rapper. I used to try and do a little rappin' too or whatever, but at the time, you know, it seemed like I enjoyed beatboxing more.

You just felt like you were better at it?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. But then me and Mike-D, you know with SUC? Me and Mike-D, back then we used to beatbox and rap together a lot. Back in middle school and then you know later on…because he was more of a rapper than he was a beatboxer, but you know he used to beatbox a bit, too. Later on down the road he pretty much started pursuing his rap career, and you know, you got to a point where people wasn't really beatboxin' no more.

They really kinda don't anymore.

Yeah, but you know back *then,* that's pretty much what it was all about, rappin' and beatboxin'.

Back then, some of the stars were beatboxers. Buff Love, Doug E. Fresh…

Yeah, yeah. That's what we used to do back then.

So where were you…were you at the Rhinestone, or what?

Nah, I didn't start really goin' to clubs and stuff 'til later on and stuff. I missed a lot of the big concerts and stuff that used to come into town. Growin' up… I don't know…I was in the streets real hard and you know…a lot of the concerts and different things, some of the things people were goin' to…I didn't go to a lot of that. But then, later on I started, you know, tryin' to hit up a lot of stuff or whatever, but…I got in the streets kinda early.

How old were you then—how old are you now?

I'll be 36 in July.

What were the streets like in South Park for you at that young age?

Well, I was already gettin' high and stuff like that, in middle school, you know ... so I got to high school, it wasn't really no big thing. Basically, I just ... intensified it, you know—intensified the high. Started doin' a little petty ... a little petty hustlin' and stuff like that ... you know, more girls and stuff like that 'cause you know when I was 12-years-old, that's when I first realized that I was a player. And then when I got 13, I tried to pimp my friend's ho ... but you know, since then—I'd say within about the last year, year and a half, I've pretty much tried to change my life. Take a different course. You know, I've been thinkin' ... I've been thinkin' more about the spiritual than the natural, you know what I'm sayin'? Because when I close my eyes for the final time, I don't ... I wanna be confident in where I'm goin'. I don't wanna be caught up in this, you know what I'm sayin'? But like you say, back in the mid-'80s or whatever, there was a lot of things ... there was a lot of things bein' birthed and a lot of new things ... people was breakdancin', poppin' and lockin', and you know, I tried to do a little bit of breakdancin', but it really wasn't my thing. Like I say, I was mainly a beatboxer and you know, I was skippin' class a lot and gettin' in trouble ... I really didn't think I was gonna graduate, to go to high school to the ninth grade ... but when I got to the ninth grade, that was the first time that I had failed. Not because I couldn't do the work but mainly because of absences. I was skippin' at school a lot because I had started gettin' in the street. Like I say, I was smokin' more weed and I started sellin' crack and all that. Basically, thuggin' ... and started keepin' me a firearm with me and you know, just gettin' into little nonsense trouble and stuff. I went to juvenile when I was 14. Aggravated assault. All that was senseless. About a couple of weeks after that, went to jail again for havin' a pistol. You know, I was in and out of jail for my teenage years, juvenile years ... I kinda slowed down a little bit, goin' to jail ... I ended up goin' to prison and stuff a little bit down the road. I mean, a lot of things changed so far as the music ... a lot of the other stuff pretty much stayed the same as far as people fixin' up cars, you know, slabs or whatever ...

That's always been a part of Houston.

People fixin' up slabs and goin' to hang at MacGregor Park, hittin' different little club scenes, throwin' block parties, hittin' this and this and that ... but I'ma tell you a big difference probably ... now versus then ... I think probably ... I think there was a lot more unity back then especially so far as the DJ, MC and stuff concerned ... nowadays it seems like the music industry has kinda got a whole lot more politics involved. You got all these DJ pools and all these DJ clubs and such and such ... it's kinda like the MC and the DJ on separate *teams* or somethin', you know? Instead of one another helpin' each other to prosper, it's kinda like a ... almost like a gang thing ... "If you not down with this, we not gonna help you do *this*." And speakin' of gang things ... a lot of that I'm pretty sure had something to do with it, too, but I'm just sayin' even people that's not in gangs have to go through some of the similar things that people have to go through in gangs 'cause they not a part of a certain organization or they not supportin' a certain organization or somethin' like that. You know ... the DJs don't wanna play your music, and they don't wanna give you a chance.

How organized was gang activity back then? And I'm not just talking about crime—I'm talking about the gang presence.

It really tripped me out, because you know when I was growin' up ... a lot of the L.A. gangs and Chicago gangs and this and that ... they didn't really have much influence on my neighborhood or surrounding neighborhoods. And then, as time went on, that changed *drastically*. I mean, that's like ... when you ride through some neighborhoods, if you don't know where you at, you might think that you know, you in Cali or Chicago for the simple fact ... the influence that a lot of those gangs have put upon some of the other cities or whatnot because—me personally ... I'm not fittin' to represent nobody else's neighborhood, nobody else's street and all that. That's what be trippin' me out about a lot of people I know ... they representin' areas and places that they not even familiar with, that they not even from and a lot of them, where they can't even go—they won't even be accepted at! So, you know, that be trippin' me out.

We think about something like that today where we have the internet as a possible tool, where something like that could trickle down, where you could find out about it, about gangs, but back then, how would somebody have done that from afar? How would somebody have put their influence there?

Well, for one, we already know that that movie *Colors* played a big part in it because a lot of people see movies and see TV and you know, for some reason they glamorize that stuff. You know, they get all flabbergasted and, like I say—TV, and people wantin' to be *on* TV—so a lot of people wanna live the lives that they see people livin' on TV. But then when you got guys from Cali and different places that come to a different region or area or whatever, you know, some of these guys be fascinated by that for some reason. And then they wanna learn about those peoples' lifestyles, the organizations they into, and the next thing you know they wanna join.

They wanna be a part of it.

Yeah, just like how the armed services—Marines, Air Force and Army and stuff send recruiters out to different neighborhood areas to get people... you know, a lot of the gangs do the same thing. And you be havin' so many people eager to be a part of something and belong to something and do something that they get caught up.

How easy was it when you were growing up in South Park, when you were 13, 14-years-old—well, I don't know if that's how old you were when you were selling crack but I definitely know people who were selling crack when they were...

Yeah, yeah, yeah! That's how old I was when I first started.

How easy was it for you to get into that, and how easy would it have been for you to avoid that?

Well, first of all, drugs were in my house when I was growing up. My old man was a math and science teacher, but he was also a daily user of marijuana and alcohol. And you know, later on he ventured off into other drugs... but he also sold and grew weed. It started off bein' in my house, so when I went in the streets and saw other people gettin' high it wasn't nothin' odd to me. It was normal. So that's how easy it was for me to start gettin' high and eventually into drug peddling and stuff like that. But I didn't *sell* crack for as long a period of time as most people I know. For some reason, it just really didn't sit right with me. I never really... I don't know, there's just something about cocaine and crack, man, that just didn't... I just really didn't agree with it. I guess for one—you can see what it do to people, and two—you know, they started givin' real harsh and stiff punishments for people that were bein' caught with it and I just didn't feel that it was worth it.

So you drew the line. Do you think a lot of people did? Do you think a lot of people saw that crack is a much different thing than just smoking a blunt?

Well, I think so far as *using* it, I think more people probably try to separate the harshness of it... you know, a lot of people, when they talk about usin' it, they might say, "Cocaine is a lot different than weed," but when it comes to *sellin'* it, most people probably pretty much put it in the same category. Me, you know, I used to sell weed for years and years and years and to me, it was totally different than sellin' crack. I mean, but you know, a person who don't do neither one'll probably put it all in the same category.

Did you separate that because of... you must have seen a difference—you sell some crack to somebody and you sell some weed to somebody, you gotta see a difference in the customer, right?

Yeah, that's true. That's true. You could see a difference because weed is something that's more manageable, whereas crack cocaine, seem like people just go all out to where they jeopardize everything. They livelihood *period*. Just losin' everything from they house, they kids, they means of makin' a livin', they groomin', they self-respect. I mean *everything*. Weed, you know... you don't really see too many people lose as much behind that. I mean, it *happens* now—don't get me wrong. It's just very, very... scarce when compared to what the effects that cocaine have on people.

What about syrup? From your perspective.

Syrup ... see, now I done did a lot of different drugs myself, too, personally. Syrup is very, very addictive. You know, a lot of people get caught up with syrup because it got to a point to where it was like a social thing. Like, "You drink this syrup and kick it with us—you hip." Part of the in-crowd. That's how a lot of people was lookin' at it, but not realizin' that syrup was just as addictive as heroin and cocaine! 'Cause I ... I'm speakin' from *experience*, 'cause I know it was real ... it was *real* hard for me to kick the habit. I mean *real* hard. And if you not sellin' drugs, or have some high payin' job, then I don't know what kind of means a person will take to try and supply that habit because that's a real expensive high.

It's really expensive.

I was addicted to syrup for, you know, 10 years or better, and that was a *hard* 10 years, I tell you ... I'm talkin' about—feel like 20, 25 or somethin' ...

How did you kick it? How did you kick the habit?

Well, I guess it's pretty much like anything else. You know, you have to ask for help from your higher power. A lot of times, yeah, we think we can do everything by ourselves, but we end up findin' out that's not true. So we have to ask for help. You know, from God. But I don't care how many 12-step programs you go in and this, this and that ... ain't none of that gonna do you no good if you not gettin' help from the right source, you know what I'm sayin'? Yeah.

Some people will look in from the outside and see rap culture as an exploitation of women ... What's your take on that now, *from what you used to do to your new outlook?*

Well, first of all—not just from a pimp's perspective but just from anybody's eyes I guess, you know ... a person is only gonna do what they are allowed to do. And a lot of times, we get so caught up in doin' what we wanna do, we forget about what we *should* do. And I say that to say this: when these females can dress half-naked and get all the attention that they feel they want, been missin' and feel they need or whatever to help with whatever complexes they might have or whatever ... and they go out and do that, they get the type of responses and things that they *want*, then ... they not gonna see nothing wrong with it. The same way as ... as a pimp—the pimp don't see no problem with it either because the same attention that they gettin', a pimp know that there's gonna be guys that's willin' to pay and this and this and that and if he can get into the chick head good enough then he knows he's gonna make that benefit him. But what I come to realize is that the pimp ain't really no better than the ho. In *God's* eyes. You know what I'm sayin'? But as a pimp we think, "Well this hooker ain't nothin'. She goin' out here turnin' tricks and havin' sex with all these guys, don't care about us, blah, blah blah ..." But at the same time, in God's eyes we ... the pimp ain't no better than the ho.

Some guys that say that everything they do from the moment they wake up in the morning—the slabs, cars, jewelry—that everything they do is for the ladies.

Well, see ... me personally, I tend to disagree. Now, you got a lot of people ... see the main ones who say that ... I mean, don't get me wrong—I'm pretty sure there might be some pimps that say that, too, but most people who think like that are the tricks. Them the ones that wanna give the ladies all they money, see. A pimp and any man with any kind of wisdom knows it's about *him*. It's about *him*. Because ... you ain't gonna get nowhere runnin' behind no women, and always tryin' to please women and puttin' yourself on the back burner, know what I'm sayin'? *You got to be your primary concern.* Because you got to make sure that you are the foundation. You got to be solid like concrete. And anything else that you get that's worthy, you can build with that. But you can't never have nothing steady runnin' around chasin' skirts.

How early on did you realize that? Did you learn that early on?

Oh yeah. Most definitely. Like I say in one of my books—I feel I learned more between the ages of 12 and 17 than most men probably learn in they entire life. About women.

Why is that?

Well because ... for one, see ... most kids ... most boys grow up tryin' to learn how to have sex with little girls ... tryin' to say the right phrase or right line, do the right thing. But little girls ... most little girls are brought up and then taught how to play games and run games on little boys, you understand what I'm sayin'? So it's kind of like a cat and mouse game from the beginning. And that's how a lot of people are brought up. But somebody have to step in and tell the people, "Well, hey—the *man* is the head of the household. The *man* was here first. The woman was put here to please *man*." So, the man has to stand up. Be the tree. And everything else be the branches from the tree. But a lot of men feel like they can't do nothin' without no woman. And like you say—some of them feel that it's *all* about the woman. But a smart person'll tell you it's a *man's* world. A woman just helps make it complete.

You were talking about how you've been looking at things differently for the past year, year and a half. Tell me what you're seeing now that you didn't see before.

Well, for one ... here true enough, I was pimpin' hos, but the devil was pimpin' *me*. I was pimpin' hos, but the devil was pimpin' *me*. I pimped hos for like about 15 years or so, you know, and I can't lie to you—I done had some good times and a lot of good memories and stuff like that, but when it all boils down to it, it really was all really meaningless, and I just got tired of my life going in circles. I was feeling like I was getting the short end of the stick a little too often, you know? I was puttin' too much time, money and effort into the things that I was doin' and I felt like my output wasn't sufficient. Once you keep doin' somethin' like that and you feel like them lil' hampsters, in a cage spinnin' all his wheels, exertin' all they energy not goin' nowhere ... well, sooner or later reality gonna slap you in the face. I'd be like, "You know, well, if you keep doin' this, you gonna keep gettin' the same results."

How did that happen for you? What was that slap in the face?

Well ... for one, I guess after ... I didn't do no long bids or nothin' in jail, just like a year or so at a time, but still goin' back and forth to jail and then gettin' out, pretty much havin' to start over and then a lot of the females were, you know, untrustworthy. They had selfish intentions.

Yeah I read your book.

[*laughs*] Yeah! And so you know, just dealin' with a lot of them day after day, week after week, month after month, you like, "Man, you know, there gotta be somethin' better for me than this. *Got* to be." That was one of the things I kept sayin' to myself—got to be somethin' better. But you know, I was in denial for a long time because I'd just say, "You know, maybe if I could just find me some better *women*, that would have a whole lot to do with it." Which was *true*, but the better women I needed to find wasn't *hookers*, see? That's the main thing I was really lookin' for was hookers, you know? If a female is a hooker, I don't care how good of a hooker she is, she's still a hooker, which means that somewhere in her mind or in her heart, somethin' is not right. Somethin' that she goin' through, somethin' that got a hold of her that's just not right. And whatever it is that's got a hold on her, and have her not right, is gonna also make her not be right with *you*. Or in my case—not be right with *me*. So a lot of the qualities that I was probably really lookin' for in women, I wasn't gonna find in those type of women. But as long as I was in that *mindframe*, it didn't matter because the main thing I was tryin' to do was get as much as I could get and split. Gain 'em, maintain 'em, and drain 'em, know what I'm sayin'? I knew they wasn't gonna stick around no way. That wasn't even my intention. I mean, if they was good enough—yeah, I would try and keep them around long as possible. But I knew that it wasn't gonna be long before they unraveled.

Do you think that your past kind of had to happen to get you where you are now? Was this all a lesson that needed to happen?

Oh yeah, oh yeah—most definitely. It's part of my testimony, you know? But it's hard for us to talk to anybody else about things, especially when we haven't went through nothin'. We have to get down and dirty and then wipe the mud and stuff off of us in order to let other people know, "Hey, you don't wanna get in this. You don't wanna get down and dirty like I did because you don't wanna suffer a lot of the consequences that I had to suffer, and then maybe there's worse than I managed to weave around and weave through," you know?

If somebody would have told you that back in the day, would you have listened?

It's hard to say. It's hard to say because like I say, experience is the best but then when you have somebody that at *least* try to talk to you and can warn you about some of life's pre-set traps, I'm pretty sure it'll make a difference. Now, some things, I'm pretty sure you have to experience on your own, but ... *maybe* ... some of the things can be avoided and *maybe* you won't have to go through some of those things, and if you *do* then possibly you would know how to deal with them better where you have a better outcome. Then you have some that you possibly just wouldn't do at all. But if we don't make some type of effort to pass the knowledge on to somebody else that could benefit and keep them from sufferin' some type of ill fate, we not sharin' our testimony, and then a lot of stuff that we went through is in vain.

(2007)

K-Rino

RAPPER · SOUTH PARK'S DEAD END

Originally broke through in 1986 with his group Real Chill, who would release one of the earliest Houston rap records with the single "Rockin' It." One of the most prolific and consistent artists in Houston history, K-Rino is universally respected and nearly always mentioned in the same breath as the top two or three rappers in the city. He is the founder of the South Park Coalition and has released over two-dozen albums, the majority of them since 2004. This interview was conducted in three parts in 2006. The first part takes place at a barbecue in J Chill's backyard in South Park.

Talk about Houston, even without the rap, just kind of Houston in general. Your thoughts on it. Your perspective on it. You've grown up here, you've lived in multiple neighborhoods in Houston.

Houston is a cool city because number one: I like the weather. I like to play basketball, so it's the only place I know where I can shoot hoop year-round. A lot of people like to come down here and live down here because the cost of livin' is pretty cool compared to places like California or New York or places like that. It's an independent city. A lot of people do they own thing out here. We're not predominantly followers. We pretty much do our own thing in Houston. A few people tryin' to claim gangs and all that but that ain't too prevalent out here to my knowledge. But it's a cool city, man, and with the music scene bein' like it is now, there's a bigger spotlight on the city now because the world's attention is on Houston now. So there's a good opportunity for anybody that wanna come down, whether it be music, real estate—you know, the real estate market is huge out here because there's so much land and space. It's a good place to live. I wouldn't live anywhere besides Houston. I'll go visit a lot of places but I wouldn't trade just livin' in Houston for nowhere.

Do you think the recent blitz will ultimately be good or bad for Houston's independence as far as hip-hop?

It depends on what the attention is centered around. If the attention is centered around—like we were speaking about off-camera—the *garbage* side of the industry, then it's bad. If it's centered around the true foundation of the hip-hop scene and where it came from and where it is now—that process almost like a child bein' brought into the world from conception to manhood—that's a good thing. Because I can remember when there *wasn't* a scene, when people laughed at us. People thought we was country. People said all we did down here was ride horses, rope cows and all that, nobody down here had no rap skills. You know, I had to battle cats on the East Coast just to prove that Houston had rap skills. So it's a good thing depending on what that attention is centered around. We don't wanna glorify no *nonsense*. A lot of cats, new cats, that get in the game, they don't understand that. They come in, they glorify a buncha drugs and a buncha nonsense that's really not representative of what the game is about or what it was about in the beginning. Because in the '90s, everybody that you see that's a part of this deal that we're doing here right now, we focused on *skills.* And we was *known* for that. I traveled, and I *knew* the things that attracted people to this city, to the artists in this city, and it was talent and skills. It wasn't about a buncha bubblegum rap back then.

You've said to me before that you feel the first time the people in Houston ever gave rap from Houston a real chance was when the Geto Boys released the track "Scarface." Do you think that set everything off on the right foot as far as where everything is now *in Houston?*

Yeah, I do because that was the first glimpse. For me, that was the first time I ever saw the locals supportin' somebody else that was local. 'Cause it seemed like before then, that was something that people didn't view as being *possible.* Because everything had to come from New York, everything had to come from the West Coast. But then it was like, "Man, they ain't gonna support you if you *from* here —they gonna look at ya like *ah, I know that fool. I ain't worried about him.*" When Face dropped the song "Scarface," if you go to the club and it come on and everybody singin' it word for word... that's what gave everybody motivation to be like, "Aight—I can do this too," you know? Because if he could make 'em feel his words and he could sell records, then I could do that, too. Because I was the same way! I used to be like, "Man, they not gonna support—you gotta go out of town. You gotta leave and come back." But once I saw that, to me, that was the turning point of knowin' that the scene can blow up out here and people will support they own. The radio stations, they not gonna do it until the streets—until you blow up in the underground. Once you blew up in the underground and then the streets is followin' you, then they'll jump on the bandwagon, but initially you not gonna get that from the radio stations.

How much did things change for you once the Geto Boys started to break?

It just changed for me from a motivational standpoint. You know, we was still doin' the same things that we was doin' but we saw this guy go from the same level we was on to *this* level. So it was motivatin'. It was like, "Okay, he did it—we can do it, too." And then it wasn't even a year or two later when the S.P.C. thing started takin' off and we started seein' firsthand within our own circle. So it was a blessin', man, 'cause somebody got to be the first. Somebody got to be the person to get the ball rollin' and get things sparked up and in my eyes it was Face and the Geto Boys that did that. Even though there mighta been cats that came a little bit before them, somebody still had to be the first, to lay that blueprint. And that's what they did.

You've been sober your whole life. You don't make a big point of it but it's a fact. How do you feel about the whole culture of syrup, not so much with your clique but with the SUC in particular—do you think it's been a positive thing or a negative one? It's definitely affected the music.

Well, it's a negative thing from the standpoint of that... it's not good for you to consume that. But, if I'ma criticize *that,* then I gotta criticize myself for my *own* vices. Because just because I might not do *that,* there's still something else that I might do. *Behind* closed doors, that might not fall into that particular category. It might be drugs for this cat, it might be... sellin' drugs for this cat, it might be stealin' for this cat, or whatever the case might be, so... I don't believe in glorifyin' none of the negative things. We *do* it, but I don't condone glorifyin' it. So I don't knock nobody for what they do. I might not agree with it, but we have to come into the knowledge of understandin' it like, "Okay, we do this, but we in the process of growth." As long as you're in this music business you're in the growth process. There's things I rapped about 10 years ago that I wouldn't say now. I listen back and I'm like, "Man, I shouldn'ta did that." There's things that I did 10 years ago that I wouldn't do now. So... I'm gonna look at that person not necessarily for where he *is* and what he's sayin' now, but I'ma try to see the potential in that artist to grow. And it's whoever's job that may have already been through them stages and came out of 'em... if it's me or if it's anybody else ... it's they job to incorporate that into *they* music and to chop it up with that person one on one. To try to bring *them* to that point. It's about just growin', man. I don't condone it, but I'm not gonna condemn them for that.

Do you think that where something like that is concerned, that it's a fine line between glorifying ... and just telling the truth?

It is. But the thing is ... the rap audience—they know how to distinguish that difference. Anybody with general intelligence knows how to distinguish the difference between the glorification and the realization. So if you look at a situation where you say, "Okay, this cat braggin' about how many keys he moved and how much dope he sold," you could tell, you know? Because it's gonna pretty much be in your face. But then you got another song that might say, "Well ... I did what I had to do to survive ... I didn't wanna do it. I had to stay alive. My mama was strugglin', my daddy," whatever the case might be. So you look at that from a standpoint of sayin', "Okay, this cat speakin' to the hearts and the minds of the dude who like, 'Man, I don't know no other way. I got to do it the way I'm doin' it.'" The audience knows the difference.

Do you think the whole culture of syrup drives Houston music or just mirrors it?

Nah, nah, it don't drive it, because Houston music was here before that came.

As far as the Screw sound, though.

Not even the Screw sound, because they started off just rippin' freestyles in Screw house. And that wasn't the basis of the lyrics back then. It was mixed in just like people used to say about us ... they'd say, "Ah, man ... S.P.C. ... all the rap about is violence. All the rap about is killin' and this and that." So people would say that was the driving force behind what we did, but it wasn't. Because there's a lot of other things that we incorporated, a lot of knowledge that we gave in our music. So we used to be offended that people would say that about us. So I would look at them as the same way. There's too many skilled artists in the SUC. There's a lot of artists in the SUC that I love listenin' to. So syrup was just ... and all of 'em don't talk about that! What happens is, when you got these copycat rappers out here, just the regular run of the mill cats out here that may *hear* somebody speak on a lil' somethin' in a song and then *they* try to run with it, and they glorify it. That's what spreads it out in the street like that—people not bein' true to who they are as an artist.

Skimming off the top.

Right. You know, you don't do it like that. Them guys are way deeper than just talkin' 'bout some syrup. And like I say, I can *relate*, because they used to try to put a brand on us. A reporter told me one time, a journalist for this magazine, "Why all y'all rap about is violence?" I'm like, "You don't listen to our music if that's what you think that's all we rap about." Because that ain't all we rap about.

The second segment of the interview is from an email exchange.

Why is the new record called Worst Rapper Alive*?*

The new record is called *Worst Rapper Alive* for a number of reasons. The initial reason was sarcasm. Of course I feel like I'm one of the better artists out there, but the game is so mixed up that anything with substance goes against the grain and is really contrary to what's popular today. So my thinking is, if what's being played on radio and seen on TV is the best, then I must be the worst.

Less than half of the tracks feature guests ... was that intentional?

Partly. I go through phases where I want to work with multiple artists on a project, but sometimes the album takes a course of its own. It all depends on the subject matter of each song. If the songs I come up with happen to be songs that I can visualize a certain artist on, then I'll try to work with that artist, but some songs are just for me and on this particular CD, like some of my past CDs, I had a lot to say and that limited the features. Even when I have features, it's more than likely gonna be the same people—Point

Blank, Klondike Kat, Z-Ro, Murder One, Trae, Dope E., Ganxsta N-I-P and other S.P.C. members.

Do you approach a song from a lyric, an idea or just a feeling that you need to get "it" out?

All of the above. It depends on the situation. My best songs come from inspiration. In other words, just feeling a natural spark about a topic and running with it. But sometimes the music can assist you in writing a song. The mood of a particular track can put you in a mindset to create that track. Real life is also a big influence on songs and concepts. Observation of surroundings helps, too, but not everyone is able to translate what they observe into words that people will relate to. Writing is a process of thought transfer. The object is to take what I see, put it in writing, word it, and recite it in a way that will make the listener visualize exactly what I initially saw, so I'm taking a picture in my mind and sending it to yours.

Are you a rapper or a lyricist?

I guess I'm both. Two ways to look at that: If you take the word "lyricist" from a hip-hop definition, it means someone whose content is of an intellectual or skillful nature, containing subject matter that holds consciousness, metaphors, similes, big words, etcetera. Some would say that a rapper is just a guy who makes words rhyme to a beat, but ain't really talking about anything substantial. The reason I say I'm both is because I have a wide range of topics on my albums. I can be real lyrical on certain songs, and I can be simplistic and direct on others. Effectively getting the message across is the main thing. It's stupid for me or anyone else to criticize another rapper for not relaying his words in the manner that I do, because we're all different. Diversity is what makes the game interesting. It's also what fuels the game and keeps it going. I had to learn that years ago. If we all rapped the same rap, rap wouldn't be considered an art form and it would eventually play out. So neither style is greater than the other. Content is what I look for when I'm listening to a rapper. That's what's most important.

To what do you credit your wisdom?

I credit any wisdom that I might have to God, the teachings of the most honorable Elijah Muhammad, my parents and life experiences. We're all born knowing nothing, so the object in life is to accumulate knowledge. But it doesn't stop there. Wisdom is the application of that knowledge. It does no good to know something if you don't apply it to your everyday life and the lives of others. I can't say that I do that all the time, so I don't consider myself to be wise, but I am knowledgeable in some areas. I'm still as big a fool as the next person.

Who do you read?

Mostly Elijah Muhammad. That's the foundation for me. I've been down with The Nation of Islam for years, and I've learned more from them than I did in all my years of public school. Books like *Message To The Blackman In America*, *How To Eat To Live*. These are books that will open up your eyes and give you better understanding of certain things. And how to deal with life, make your own life better.

You've never messed around with drugs or alcohol. Did you see an example early on that led you away from that type of life?

Not really. It was just a decision I made for myself. My parents were good enough examples for me. Plus I was never a follower in the sense of going along with the crowd. If I didn't wanna do something, I didn't do it, and nobody could make me do it. That doesn't make me perfect or an angel, though. I do my share of wrong just like everybody else, it's just that drinking and smoking isn't my thing. But I do have other vices, believe me. So just because I don't indulge in those things doesn't make me better than a person who does. I'm not worthy to judge anyone for what they do when I still got work to do on myself.

How do you maintain?

It's natural. It's not hard at all for me to just be the way I was born. I was born sober. For the most part, all of us were. To use a familiar term, I get high on life. Drugs are an outside substance that people choose to put into their systems. I can't miss something I've never had and I've never been curious about trying it. Plus, I see the effect that it has on people who do it. People start doing drugs and then they develop a dependency on them. I'm not the type of dude that does things by association. I would never condemn anyone who does though, because like I said, I got many faults.

Why do you think that mainstream rap fans have so little patience for something with intellect?

Well, it's hard for a person to have patience with something that he or she doesn't understand. If you were constantly speaking French to a person who only knew English, they would become frustrated. The industry has flooded the fans' minds with materialism, sex, drugs, diamonds, and cars—basically making the majority of hip-hop listeners drunk off those topics. The sad part of it is that most of the rappers don't even realize that this is being done. They're only speaking about their reality—some of them. The ones that do realize that it's an industry setup still cater to it in order to sell records. This was a process carried out by the industry to dumb down the fans, and take our attention away from anything uplifting in the music. So when somebody like me comes along, the words go over a lot of people's heads because I'm speaking on things they might've never knew existed, or things that they're not accustomed to hearing, and doing it from an intellectual standpoint. This forces the listener to have to think and rationalize, and that's hard for a mind that's been stagnated and poisoned by superficial music for years and years. So it's really not 100 percent their fault. We as artists and the business itself share in the blame—and notice I said "we," because I'm guilty of it as well.

What effect has this year's explosion of Houston hip-hop had on the underground?

It's had more of an effect on the mainstream to me because now Houston is getting recognized and respected as a legitimate market in the industry. The underground really isn't seeing any benefit from it in my opinion, because real underground artists are not going to change to suit what the majors want. So in my case, I would have to come across a label that respects what I do and is willing to market and promote me based on who I am, and not the perception of what they think a Houston rapper should be based on what's hot at the moment. I'm proud of all these cats out here that blew up. I wish them 10 times the success they already have, but the majors have to understand that Houston has more to offer than what's being presented to the world from us right now. If the music is good, whether underground or whatever, there's a market for it, and if properly pushed, it will sell. And that's not a knock on any artist, because if you're from Houston and you're successful, K-Rino ain't got nothin' but love for you. I find myself defending my city all the time to out of towners, and they don't understand why I support styles of rap that I don't necessarily do. It's because these cats help keep our city's name on the map. So anybody that talks down on any rappers from Houston, I'm going to have something to say about it.

Does your song "Three Gods" have more to do with the idea of a "god" to someone as a person of faith, or does it tie in to what we as men and women often succumb to?

It's based on what we succumb to. There are many gods. We make things our god, based on our love or lust for them. If you are addicted to drugs, then drugs has become your god. Same with money, sex, jewelry, power, fame, food, alcohol, etcetera. The object of that song was to open our eyes to all the base-level things that we, as people, place worship on, as opposed to the *real* God, who wants us to bow down to nothing or no one but him.

Do you feel like there's hypocrisy in the Bible's role in popular Christianity?

It's not necessarily a hypocrisy. I would say it's more of a lack of understanding of the scriptures of the Bible. 10 people can read the same thing and get 10 different meanings from it. I feel like most people don't understand what they read and claim to believe in. I do feel that there's hypocrisy between the religion of Christianity and the actual teachings of Jesus Christ. Men have placed their spin on it, and a lot of what is being practiced and preached in Jesus's name wouldn't be recognized by Jesus himself. The Bible in its present form has been altered and tampered with, and there are many man-made denominations of Christianity as well as other religions. This is what has caused confusion and division among the people.

Men writing their own Bibles?

A real man humbles himself and seeks truth wherever he can find it. I don't believe that people should create their own ideologies and concepts of God. That's a very arrogant and ignorant thing to do in my opinion. We don't have to write our own Bible, because we're already in the existing Bible. It's just about being able to find yourself in the book and understand the scriptures as they relate to your life. Our presence is strong in the Bible and the Holy Qur'an, but the only thing I can say to a person who is frustrated by all of the different religions and doesn't want to subscribe to any one in particular is try to live with his or her life on basic principles of truth. Belief in a higher power comes first, then it's about cleaning yourself up and trying to help others. The honorable Elijah Muhammad said it best, though. He said, "You don't have to teach religion, just teach history. Because if you teach a man his history, it'll walk him back into his religion."

The third part of the interview was conducted along with Peter Beste in K-Rino's Third Ward apartment.

What led you to form the South Park Coalition?

Well, it wasn't a calling or nothin'. I just wanted to put together an organization of local rappers and unify the city in a sense, because it was a lot of battling and hatred going on in those days. I just felt like we could be stronger if we came together. At the time I didn't know that it would grow like it did. I can't take all the credit for the growth because many other rappers and record labels had a hand in exposing the S.P.C. on a worldwide level.

Is it as powerful today as it was when it was formed … or more so?

No, it's nowhere near what it used to be. Our popularity started in 1991 when Ganxsta N-I-P signed a deal with Rap-A-Lot Records. N-I-P is an S.P.C. member, and being on a major label like Rap-A-Lot gave him worldwide exposure. Other S.P.C. members were featured on his album, and that provided us with a platform to show the world who we were. We were really the first organized group of rap artists from the South. The S.P.C. consists of many solo artists and groups. We had the South on lock from the early to mid-'90s. I give Rap-A-Lot Records a lot of credit for making us popular as well. These days, our biggest support comes from overseas.

You started in '86?

It was '86 when I was just messin' with it. It was '87 when we really started piecing it together. It was me, but it wouldn't have been nothin' without the cats that was in it, you know what I'm sayin'? N-I-P wasn't even in it in the beginning, it was just dudes I went to school with, dudes like Rapper K and C-Rock, these old school cats that a lot of people don't even *know* now. Me and N-I-P and all them used to *battle* back in the days. Me and N-I-P had this one strong battle that really like set everything straight, and we went so hard that everybody who was out there said, "Man, we can't really say who won. It was a tie," and me and him just got cool after that. And we've been like that ever since.

Where was that?

That was at a spot called The Battleground, it's on Bellfort and Martin Luther King. It's a Walgreens now, but it used to be just … it was raw over there.

It was the same building, though?

Nah, we wasn't inside. We was outside in the parking lot. But the Walgreens now wasn't there then. It's more beautified now. But it used to look real rough over there. See, he went to Jones High School, I went to Sterling. He didn't wanna battle me in my spot and I didn't wanna battle him in his spot so we just met in the middle. So that's the spot we decided on.

So this was '87—before the S.P.C.?

The S.P.C. was going on but they wasn't a part of it then, but it was small. Like I said, it was really just cats that went to school with me. So once me and N-I-P battled, he brought his people, I brought my people. But when I got cool with him, his people *became* my people …

And your people became his people …

Right, exactly. We all came together. N-I-P, Murder One, A.C. Chill, Klondike Kat—they all went to school together. Me, Rapper K, C-Rock … all of us went to school together. So we just mashed our people together … me and N-I-P was the leaders. Once me and him got cool, everybody else got cool.

That was after Real Chill?

That was after Real Chill, yeah.

Before Real Chill, when you were in high school … what were you listening to?

When I came up, man, rap was new in Houston. I was listening to Run–D.M.C., all the mainstream stuff that was out then. EPMD was around … this was right before Boogie Down Productions and Public Enemy era …

And N.W.A.

Way before N.W.A., yeah. LL Cool J, Kool Moe Dee, that was what we was jammin' to back in the day, and that's the stuff that really molded us, that made us into the artists we was. I was talking to my partner Brain Dead tonight about how we was a product of the era that we came up in. That's what we rooted in. That's the type of stuff that we rap about. There was more versatility back then. You know, guys would make an album with … they wouldn't make an album with 15, 20 songs on it. They might make an album with 10 songs on it, and the topics was different. They would talk about different things on the songs.

Where did you get the name K-Rino from?

It's a name I done had since I was a young cat, before I even knew anything about rap. It didn't really have no significant meaning to it, but when I started rappin', I didn't have a name. I was just … a rapper. So I just took that name and used it as my name, but when I got, you know, smarter in the game, I was able to put an acronym to it: Killer Rhymes Intellectually Nullifying Opponents. I broke it down like that. I been K-Rino so long that it just stuck with me, and I kept it when I started flowin'.

Were other kids rapping when you first came out?

I'll put it like this: When I first started coming into the scene out here, it was around '85, '86, but the deal was that everybody was trying to be so much like Run–D.M.C., Fat Boys … whoever was hot at the time. And they'd have talent shows. Every school had a talent show, every club had a rap contest and you would see the same cats in these contests everywhere you go, depending on what side of town you was on. And me and my boys, we used to go get in the contests just like everybody else, man, and it was just a competition, man. Boys would show up, all the rappers would be spread out in different parts of the club. Like, we might be over there to ourself, these cats might be over there to theyself. Just all through the club. But you *knew* who they was. Everybody knew who was gonna be in the contest, but it didn't all come together 'til the DJ got on the mic and was saying, "Everybody in the rap contest, report to the DJ booth and choose your music." 'Cause boys didn't have instrumentals. We didn't have keyboards and drum machines then. We was from the days where we used to have to walk up to the DJ booth and say, "Hey, man I wanna rap off that Ice-T." We had to rap off other people instrumentals, you know what I'm sayin'? So it was fun, man, because it was in its purest form because we was just doin' it for the love. Nobody had records out. We was just doin' it for the competition and for the love. To be able to say, "I won a rap contest." You'd be lucky if the prize was $50. Or you *really* came up if there was a trophy involved. If one of the schools, the high schools, had a talent show then you might get a trophy. But for the most part, it was for the love and then when the contest or the talent show was over, it didn't matter who won because boys gonna still be battlin' after, *especially* if you didn't win the contest. You feel like you got cheated, and "I'm better than him, so we gonna battle. We gonna let the streets decide." It was the fun days back then because it was in its purest form.

What were the other groups out there that were doing it?

I can tell ya, no doubt. On the Northside, it was Willie D. As far as battling goes, Willie D was the king. Willie D had the Northside sewed-up. But it was also groups like Royal Flush—they was on Rap-A-Lot for a while. There was another cat named Romeo Poet. These was all on the Northside. Romeo Poet—he a legend, man. He never put a record out to my knowledge but he was around from way back in the day. Him and Willie D used to have classic battles at this club called the Rhinestone Wrangler back in the day. They had classic battles, man. I mean, got in *fights*. Royal Flush—it was straight love because there wasn't no money involved, you know what I'm sayin'? All those cats were legends, man.

Were they battling with beats behind them or was it a capella?

It was a mixture of both, man. I can speak for myself, a lot of my battles that took place was just straight a capella. And then you gotta think back to back in them days, you'd have a beatbox, be beatboxing for yourself. It was a mixture. Now, in the club situation, it could go either way. You might have a beat, but to my knowledge, to my remembrance it wasn't really too much just rappin' on a beat. The contest was for that, but when the battle started, it was just straight up me against you.

And people would crowd around, circle around you?

Yeah, no doubt, man. Back in them days, a battle could break out anywhere, man. In school ... man, the hallway. My spot was the furthest corner of the hallway. You pack up in the corner, you got your dudes doin' the beatbox. We'd just tuck in the corner—he'd beatbox and I'm rappin', the crowd is gathered, facing us, with they back to everything else. It was packed, man, just packed, and then you might get a cat that wanna come in and get down. Sometimes we'd just have a flow session. Other times, somebody'd wanna challenge you. People used to come from different schools to rap with us people. So it was a mixture, man.

Who was running the Southside back then?

Back then ... the Southside. I would have to say me, Klondike Kat, Ganxsta N-I-P. Because there wasn't no music industry. Rap-A-Lot was just starting out and they was doin' they thing.

That was around '86, '87, right?

I know the Ghetto Boys dropped that record "Car Freak," and I think all that stuff came out around '86, yeah. They came out right before us, right before Real Chill. So it might have been '86, or maybe early '87. I'm not sure. But before us you've got Wickett Crickett, O.G. Style, Lester "Sir" Pace, all the *Kidz Jamm* ... Jazzie Redd. These was the dudes that we looked up to, so if I would have to say "run the Southside," I would have to say *they* was runnin' the Southside. Then we came along, street level, 'cause I built my name up in the streets, from battlin' and from rappin' in contests and talent shows.

So out of all that, who would you say was the first solid group from Houston?

The first Houston rap group that was really solid was the Geto Boys—the original Ghetto Boys and the current Geto Boys—because J Prince had the first legitimate record label. He did something that nobody ever thought to do, you know, by starting an independent label, manufacturing and doing it all on his own, getting a buzz in the streets successfully. Because the thing in Houston, the thing *period* was like, "Look, man, if you ain't from New York or L.A., you ain't got a chance. You can't win." Because number one: You're not gonna get respected by the rest of the industry. And number two: The locals ain't gonna support you. That was the thing, man—the radio, the local radio station ain't gonna play ya. So nobody even conceived or believed that somebody from out here could come up like that. But Rap-A-Lot put it down. When the Ghetto Boys came out they had Jukebox, Johnny C, Bushwick ... Ready Red ... a lot of them was doin' they thing. But they was really the first group, and they was popular, you know what I'm sayin'? They had some good songs, man, and I started to see people accepting a Houston group. We came right behind them, and we got a lot of love behind them.

Who released "Rockin' It?"

My father. My old man, he supported me from day one, so when he found out I was tryin' to rap, he was like, "Man, what you wanna do?" And I said I'm trying to put a record out. And he was like, "Okay, well let's do a record." My old man, he was a hustler, so it wasn't no problem. Bam!

Bankrolled it.

The record dropped. No doubt. We made a lot of mistakes. We had the paper to really do a lot of things, but we didn't have the knowledge of the game to make the money work for us the way that it needed to make a success.

Do you think that knowledge even existed in Houston at that point, besides what J was doing?

It didn't exist in the *rap* industry, because there was a lot of groups that came along in Houston that had successful records maybe in R&B in the past. You had people like Archie Bell & The Drells and Skipper Lee Frazier was the guy that was really backing them. And they had a big hit, a national hit. So he had plenty knowledge of the game, but that wasn't something that *we* knew. We didn't know exactly all of the right steps to take to push and market and promote a record the way it needed to be done because, like I said, the game was in such a primitive—just in its infancy at that time, and we was just doin' this, just walkin' in the blind, hittin' our leg on furniture on the way. We had to take a lot of bumps and bruises.

You point out mistakes on that end, but when you go back and listen to the record, do you feel like you had mistakes on that end, too?

Well, you gotta understand that the whole of the project wasn't 100 percent from us. In other words, we had other people that had they hand in it, influencing us or advising us or telling us, "Do this, do this, do that." Because we did bring a couple of people in that had been involved in the business on different levels that would tell us, 'cause we was *kids.* We was still in high school. So they'd bring this guy in and say, "Yeah, man. He's ... he's a producer." Or they'd bring this guy in and say, "He knows a lot about the business." So they would put a hand in and say, "We need to make songs like this, something marketable, this is something we can shop to the labels." So the mistakes on *that* level ... I wouldn't put all the blame on us, because there was a lot of ideas and things that we wanted to do that we wasn't able to do, just like being on a major label now. The major label might take a certain amount of creative control from an artist. That's what we went through, even though we was independent. Our inexperience, and dealing with the cats that had experience—they didn't allow us ... they wasn't just gonna say, "Here's the songs, now y'all do what y'all do." It was like man, the production, the concepts—they had a hand in all of that. It got to the point where they was really sayin', "Man, y'all should do this. Let's remake this. I did this beat. See if y'all can put this to that." Really, man, we was commercial back in them days.

Do you feel fortunate that you had a taste of that pretty early? I'd be willing to bet that it led you to where you are now.

Yeah, man. There's always been a part of me that's glad that we didn't just blow up like we was. 'Cause if we did, I don't think that we'd be around now. Not saying we're just on a major level now, but because of the fact that that wasn't who we was then. So if we'd have came out like that, and had that stamp on us *then*, and by the time I grew up and matured into the kind of artist that I wanted to be and that I am now, it'd have been a contradiction. It wouldn't have been accepted. You know, people hear that record now and they say they still hear a lot of the present me in it, but they know that it's kinda still night and day.

You got it out of your system.

Yeah, you know, like I got it out of my system, but there's a learning process, too. I had to go through that because I'd rather start off bad and then evolve into what I really wanna be and what I really am than to go in reverse order.

Was that some of the impetus behind forming the S.P.C. afterwards?

Well, the formation of the S.P.C. was just something that naturally came, man. I just wanted to have a group ... a clique. I had a bunch of friends ... I was a solo artist before the Real Chill thing came along, and I went back to that afterwards because that's what I really am at heart. But I always had partners that rapped. I always had friends that I was real cool with and ran with. We'd go to clubs together, we'd go battle together. So we were already an organization, we just didn't have a name to it. So we'd *been* S.P.C., it just wasn't by that name, or any name.

Did everybody kind of feed off of each other at that point?

Once all the members was in place, then we definitely fed off each other. We made each other better, man. It's like, when you're dealing with that many tight rappers in each others' mitts all the time ... we're making songs where all of us are on these songs, it's like that all the time. If we all in the room, and I look over there and I see N-I-P writin' his verse, the beat playin', Dope E. over there writin' his verse. Klondike Kat over there writin' his verse. A.C. over there writin' his verse. You know in your mind—you don't know what's on they paper, but you know in your mind *mine can't be weak*. So you step your game up. There's a difference between me sitting in a room by myself writing a verse because I don't feel no pressure. It was really righteous competition. We was competitive with each other, but not from a negative standpoint. It's like, "I don't wanna be the weakest one on this song."

Was it the same kind of competition you felt in the battles?

The battles were competition, but back in them days it wasn't friendly. It's like a war, man. You know, the object in a rap battle is to humiliate your opponent. I don't wanna just beat you, I wanna humiliate you. Like in a boxing match, you're trying to knock this dude out. You don't want him to ever ... you want to be considered to be the best. You don't even want it to be close. So back in them days, it was real, genuine *dislike*. We didn't really like each other. That's how it was. But, that kind of competition, even through all that dislike, when you hear this person, you still have sense enough and respect enough to say, "Nah, this dude is good." You see what I'm sayin'? So you not gonna be like, "No, the dude can't rap." Respect comes out of it, especially when you done bumped heads three or four times. It's like Ali and Frazier. They didn't like each other. They fought three times. But after that third fight, they had respect for each other.

Even though they probably still disliked each other.

Yeah, they probably still disliked each other, but there was respect. And then, what comes into it is, "I don't even dislike this person no more."

How did the club scene change in the late '80s, when Rap-A-Lot started releasing more records—were there a lot more people in Houston listening to rap and coming to the shows?

Well, people was listening to rap, but they was listening to rap from everywhere else. When the Geto Boys did they thing, that was the first taste that people in Houston actually wanted to hear an artist from they own city. When the Geto Boys had this song "Assassins," and they had this other song, an instrumental called "My Word." Man, that's all I used to hear. People ridin' down the street bumpin' their bottom 'cause they had that bass in it. Then when Face signed with Rap-A-Lot, that single "Scarface" that he dropped?

When he was still Akshen, right?

Yeah, he was still called Akshen on that particular song. But the bottom line is, that song set Houston on fire. That's the first song that just ... everybody and they mama was just lovin'. It would come on in the club, everybody was lovin' it. That's when I first started sayin', "Man, you know, we can do this from out here. 'Cause Houston will accept you." The thought all them years was, "They ain't gonna support you out here."

'Cause they was lookin' at you like, "Oh, I know that fool. He ain't nobody. He ain't anything. He ain't Run. He ain't LL." Face broke that barrier down.

This was like '89, before the Geto Boys broke nationally.

Right, right. That's really the song that set it off, that "Scarface" single. Then when Willie D came into the mix, and they dropped that *Grip It*... album, it was over after that. Because they had contrast. Face was this type of rapper, Willie D was totally different. Two different types of rappers in the same group. And contrast is what makes any great rap duo. Even though Bushwick was rappin', too. But in the forefront was Face and Willie D. If you look at any of the great rap duos in the history of rap, the two rappers are totally different. Whether it be Run and D.M.C., Pimp C and Bun B, 8Ball and MJG, Andre and Big Boi from Outkast, there's contrast there, and to me, that's the formula.

How long have you realized that?

Really, man that didn't come to me until about a year or two ago. I might have been on the internet, and somebody made a post about the best duos. And as I was reading what they had, that's when it hit me, that the thing about this whole thing is that these two rappers are totally different in every group. Because if they both sound the same ... you know, you gotta have something to distinguish one from the other. That's what draws interest from the fans, because they can be totally different, but there's still a chemistry there. That's what made us successful, it's just that it wasn't a duo. There was more of us. I don't rap like N-I-P. N-I-P don't rap like Kat. Kat don't sound like Dope E. Dope E. don't sound like Point Blank. Everybody was different, and that's what people would say was the main thing that attracted them to the S.P.C., because we would always do these clique songs at the end of whoever album it was, and the point behind that was that every style would come in different. Everybody was bringin' something different to the table. But it was *chemistry* at the same time.

Was that coming into play when you were making Worst Rapper Alive*?*

Well the thing is that I'm a solo artist, so that never really crosses my mind when I'm doing a project. By the time I did *Worst Rapper Alive*... see, I'm seasoned now, so it was just another album. But all my albums take on an identity of they own, they got their own personality to them, based on the mood I was in mentally or where I was mentally when I was creating them.

What do you think the best song you've ever done lyrically would be? What are you most proud of?

Lyrically, it's hard to say. Probably one song that jumps out is the song on *Fear No Evil* called "Two Pages." For just pure lyrical skills, that's one of my best. There ain't a hook. It's called "Two Pages" because it's just two pages of straight lyrics, start to finish, and I got another one like that on the *No Mercy* album called "Non-Stop." It's nonstop all the way through. Those two are pretty lyrical. I got one on *Worst Rapper Alive* called "Loaded," but to be honest with you man, I couldn't say. I couldn't say. I'm working on a new album now and I got a song on that's called "Four Minute Warning," and it's just four minutes of lyrics. I think that's the best one out of all of them.

Can we hear a verse?

I can give you a snippet. Just a little piece. I gotta make sure I say something... y'all can edit it. In the first few bars I say: *My mother had an abortion / years before I spit a rhyme out / they threw me in the trash but two hours later I climbed out / with blood and afterbirth I started on a blind route / civilians were threatened by the sight of a newborn baby with a lion's mouth / I calculate and repopulate / at age four I started removing my own organs just to see how they operate / I can make the apocalypse end with a preposterous spin / I'm an alien python that sheds rhinoceros skin / you choke and gag when the words are spoken fast / I smoke and blast paragraphs / my throat can last in a cast swallowing broken glass / I provide infinite homicide / making you die the death that every human in history ever died / I worship on the Sabbath / then put bodies in cabinets / spared the sinners and killed the saints 'cause they was arrogant / what precedes the millimeter or 33s / I'm a* *self-producing species / your brain holds less intelligence than my feces*... that's just a little bit of it. Just a little something, man. That's on the new one. I'm looking to finish that at the end of January.

What's it called?

Ah, right now I don't even have a title for it, man. I'm just gettin' all the tracks together. I got about 10 songs written. But it's gonna be all right.

Peter said he asked you a few months ago about Worst Rapper Alive, *and you responded by saying that there was something about it that didn't make you like it as much as you did the last two. Now that it's out, do you feel any different?*

Nah. I feel the same. I'll put it like this: My albums... I compete with myself when I make an album, when I write a song, because they all are going to be judged up against each other. But when you drop so many projects, people are always gonna have they favorites, you know, and say this one was better than this one. But for *me*, I have to make sure that in *my mind*, every one is better than the last one. Every one got to be better than the last one. So, I know it's a good album, but I felt like it could have been better. I felt like it could have been better just based on the standard or the level I'd been coming with based on the previous two before that, on *The Hit List* and on *Fear No Evil*. When I got to *Worst Rapper Alive*, I was like, "Well, I got a lot more songs now, but I don't feel like it's on the level that the other two was." Not saying it's far from it. If the other ones are considered an eight, then *Worst Rapper Alive* wouldn't be no less than a seven in my eyes, but I'm trying to make it a nine, know what I'm sayin'?

I've thought about that a lot, though—that when you think about records that are important to you in your life, you can sit there and argue that such and such album wasn't as good as the one that preceded, but I've always thought that it's about where your life lines up with a particular piece of work, either as a listener or an artist. Is it the same as a lyricist, a rapper, that you can argue its merit based on where you were in yourself when you completed it?

It's like this basketball game we're watching. The deal is this here: When Dr. J came along, when he retired, it was like he set the standard. There'll never be another Dr. J, this and that. Then Jordan come along, and go to *another* level. "Oh, there'll never be another Jordan." So really, it's about that era. People still tell me that *Danger Zone* is my best album. I dropped that in '95. So, they entitled to their opinion, but when somebody tell me that an album that's 10-years-old or 7-years-old is better than something I recently dropped, that's a motivation to me, a challenge to me, 'cause I'm like, "Nah, that's not how it's supposed to be." I don't even want the fans to consider that to be the case, to be like, "I don't feel no progression." For me, I'm like, "I'm elevatin'." So I can't allow people to listen to a 10-year-old album and say it's better than a two month-old album. Even though there's still a compliment mixed in there, the best compliment someone can give you is to say, "Oh, his music is *timeless*. I can still listen to it today and it's still as relevant as it was when he first dropped it." So that's cool, too, but for me, I compete, man. I compete against myself. You can't never take a break as an artist. A lot of artists, they get in the game, they get a little success, they get a little fame or whatever and then you start seeing they level dip off. They start dropping off 'cause they get relaxed. But the bottom line is... whatever you establish yourself to be, and whatever bar you set for yourself, you got to always equal that or exceed that, because people might be *hearing* about you. You got a reputation. "Man this dude, K-Rino, man..." everybody tellin' them about this cat, he good, he this, he that. And then they hear you, and you not at your best. You took a break, took a day off on that particular verse. First impressions is lastin', you know? So I got to make sure that, like Michael Jordan said when he was talking about basketball... they asked him one time, "How come you play so hard, and y'all only playin' against the Clippers? The Clippers the worst team in the league." He said, "Because there might be somebody that's never seen me play before, and somebody been tellin' 'em about Michael Jordan." He got to be Jordan every time out. So, if I set a standard for myself, whatever it is, I got to live up to that standard every time I grab a pen or some paper and start writing a verse. Because I don't want that person hearing me for the first time to say, "He ain't all that, what everybody make him out to be." Because first impressions stick with people.

You spoke about there being some things about Worst Rapper Alive *that you didn't like as much as the ones before it. Do you feel like it can still be progressive, even if you don't like it as much?*

Progressive to me?

Progressive to you. Everyone else is on the outside, and how a record ties into or affects their lives is different from how it affects the artist.

It would have to be considered progressive to me after a certain period of time, to where I could see the effects of the album or what impact the album might have had on the people. At first creation, I might say, "Well, nah, I didn't really take it to the next level like I thought I did." But then when the album hit the world and people start saying, "Well, this song changed my life in this way," and "We wanna use this song for this and that," or "This song really touched me here," or "Everybody's feelin' this," then in hindsight I can look back and say, "Okay, maybe I did elevate, and I just didn't perceive it."

Do you think it's because at that point, once you sort of separate yourself from it, you see it as an outsider? You're never gonna listen to it as a listener would…

I'm my own worst critic, man. I'll always be my own worst critic. But I write from the perspective of the outside lookin' in.

Because it's something that you wanna hear.

What it is…I put myself in the room with the person who went and bought the album, and they sittin' up in they room or they car listening to it. So when I write a certain line, I always envision in my mind how people is gonna react to it when they hear this line. Sometimes, you be like, "They gonna trip out when they hear this." Sometimes you be like, "Nah, that ain't good enough." So yeah, I step on the outside. You know, you gotta have an out of body experience because if you get too self-centered and too internal with what you're creatin', you start getting tunnel vision and you'll fool yourself. You gotta make sure that you're writin' for you, writin' from your heart, but at the same time, people are gonna be able to hear it and feel it.

But it's a unique middle ground that a lot of artists skip over and don't understand. Even putting that record on to hear as an outsider, you still created what you wanted to hear.

See, what you're doing is you're giving the people *you*, but on the same token you have to speak the language of the people, so you have to do it in a way to where they will relate. Like you say, it's a middle ground you gotta reach. You gotta be able to say, "Okay, this is me, without question this is me. But on the same token this is me presenting it in a way that you will understand me better." If that answers the questions.

So how do you collect stories? I asked you in another interview about your dreams, and how you reference those sometimes. Where do you draw from—do you go out into the world to try and absorb stuff or does it all just sort of pop in?

It's a mixture, man. It depends on what kind of story it is. If it's a regular, down to earth hood story, it may be something that's based on actual events. If it's some type of mental, make-you-think type of story, then it might be something that was just inspired off of my own thought of what I needed to be projecting to people at the time. Like, people need to hear this, on this level. But with me, the stories all come about the same. Once I get the concept, the ending of the story comes first. The best way for me to write a story, I have to know how it's gonna end first. I don't make it up as I go along and then try to lock up on the ending. If I get the *ending*, I'm gone from there.

Is the beginning important?

The beginning is important, but the ending writes the beginning for me. It's like watching a movie. The most important part of a movie is that people wanna know how it's gonna end. That's why people watch it, whether it's a scary movie or whatever it is, it's gonna upset you if you dedicated two and a half hours to this movie and then the ending is boo boo, you see what I'm saying? You're like, "Aw, that's it?" So, I make sure that the ending is gonna be strong, so that the ending creates the rest of the song for me. I can't explain it, but that's what happens.

How long do they gestate? You've got that notebook, and you write stuff in it all the time. Say you've got a notebook full of stuff—does any part of that find its way into your lyrics two or three years down the line, or is it a group that you get out with each album?

Nah, say I mighta wrote something in 2002, but I didn't use it in 2002, I used it in 2005, because when I wrote it in 2002, it didn't fit. It wasn't time for it yet. So, I might be on another concept in 2006 and say, "You know what?" And that line will pop in my head, and say, "Yeah, this fits here," and you go back and you get it.

You still own it.

Exactly, and nobody's ever heard it. So yeah, that happens. Every rapper does that, though. Now, what you don't wanna do—you don't want to be the type of person that recycles lyrics that you done already exposed to the world. That's the challenge of it, to keep coming up with new, original lyrics and things that nobody has heard you say and do, because a lot of rappers, they recycle words, say the same stuff over and over again.

You also don't want to stitch together a bunch of stuff that doesn't work together just to have a track.

No doubt. The best songs are the ones where the lyrics just fall out of your brain. When you gotta just strain and make yourself come up with something, then it's time to put the pen down and relax and try again another day. But a lot of times, man, when you know you got a concept and it's on, it's clickin'—you gonna just be flowin' with the pen, just smoothly flowin'. People ask me, "Man, how long did it take you to write such and such?" And it might be a song that, when they hear it, it's a complex song, so they feel like, "It musta took him *weeks* to write that." So they be surprised or they just take it as, "Oh, he just playin' around, he arrogant." Nah, man, I wrote that in an hour and a half. 'Cause when you clickin', it just comes out.

Compared with the downward trend where a lot of rappers aren't actually rapping about anything.

Yeah, it's true, man. I blame it a lot on the industry's influence on rap now. But I also put some responsibility on the rappers, you know. Because we know that there's certain songs that we should make that's supposed to be a benefit, supposed to be helpful to the listener, and we all guilty of not doin' that as much as we should. But at the same time, I grew up at a time when you could hear Public Enemy, KRS-One, X-Clan—you'd hear songs like that on the radio. You see these cats' videos all the time. Now, when young black kids that's listenin' to rap, when they started gettin' into this type of music and started becoming more conscious, the industry put they hand on it and was like, "Nah, we need to take they focus off of this, and put they focus on something that's not so militant." So now, you see the materialism. You see sex, drugs, murder. You see these type of things being pushed to the forefront to where that's all you see, and they have an influence on the kids that's goin' out buying it. True enough. I don't really knock the artists that are rappin' like that because I'd be a hypocrite to do that. I still make a lot of songs that ain't the most positive songs in the world. But I always say, at least give one or two, just to show the people that, "Hey, you know what? I have fun, I party, I talk about what I talk about, but let's be real. I *do* care about what's going on in my community." I don't glorify the negative parts of the hood. *Speak* on the negative parts of the hood, but offer solutions in your music if you can. Because some of them ... you can't blame a rapper for talking about what he talking about if he don't know no better, or if he don't know the answers, you know? I can't expect a dude to offer a solution that he don't have. So I'm for all these cats out here, you know, I wish them all the best. But I wish that all of us, me included, would start being more responsible for what we say. Because you know, that's some serious blood on your hands when you say things that have that kind of influence on people that's listenin' to it and then they go out and may act on somethin' that you said. It happens, and people will say, "Man, you can't blame that on the…" No, you can't blame it entirely on us because it ain't our job to necessarily raise the children. That falls on the parents, but the kids is listenin' to rappers more than they listenin' to they parents these days! So, we got to help raise 'em, man. We got to.

(2006)

DJ Chill

SOUTH PARK'S DEAD END

After befriending a young DJ Screw in the late '80s, the two began DJing around town together, sharing equipment and learning from one another while developing their own styles. Chill would later become the featured DJ on Matt Sonzala's long-running radio show Damage Control, and is still an active DJ as well as a clothing designer.

If Screw were around today, how do you think what he was doing would survive in this economy?

He would survive in this economy because he was on the forefront of the situation. So you have to feel value in his music. They would still value him. They would still value going out and listening to his music. People will still go out and buy Jordans. They believe in that, they'll still hold onto that. They believed in him, so they still hold on to Screw tapes. That's the only the reason the Screw shop is still alive, because cats value listening to his music. They grew up with it, they wanna keep it. That's like cats right now, they still buyin' elbows even though they look different. People still buy 'em because they remember when they wanted them when they were a kid, and now that they got that money they're gonna go get 'em. Which is stupid, but…

What do you think it was about Screw that made people so dedicated to him in that respect?

Man, it's like… a lot of cats really don't know how dedicated he was to the music. And you can hear it in how the production was. So that's how you knew how dedicated he was to it. He was a rare commodity. That was kind of exotic, so that's what made it of value.

When you were holding a Screw tape in your hand, you were holding something really special.

Oh yeah! Man, I remember times when we would make a list and he would make that tape, that was like having a personalized shirt! You know what I'm saying? Nobody had that shirt *on* but *you*! Nobody was shoutin' out nobody else name but *you*. Unless you had somebody you had you wanted him to shout out. But other than that, that was your personal relation right there. That was like you havin' your own slab, your own car, your own car the way *you* want it to be. The way you wanna look it. Your own *paint* job. That was of *value*.

So it was a reflection of you but it was also a reflection of somebody you believed in, Screw.

Yeah! The way he put it down, and there was more to it. There was an art to it, too, because the *way* he put it down. He put so much energy into it. He put a lot of *him* in it. Cats couldn't duplicate.

What were the sessions like at his house? Did time just sort of get … lost? Stand still?

The first sessions he was doin' at the apartment was different than the ones he was doin' at his house. The ones at the apartments, there wasn't any sessions. Cats would just drop off a list and he was in his own world doin' 'em. When he came down to the microphone and, you know, all that started when he had his crib. So *those* sessions right there were kinda crazy because it was dark—it was dark and you couldn't see what time of day it was outside. So, once you got in there, you was in another world.

That's the way he liked it, being a different little universe, huh?

Yeah, that was crazy. That was totally different right there. You'd come out the next morning and damn …

So he would just mix and people would step up to the mic?

You'd step up to the mic and just go, know what I'm sayin'? If you was there that evening, you might not come out 'til that next morning, so there wasn't no time … time wasn't of the essence to him, know what I mean? Time was just time.

(2007)

LOS

RAPPER · MISSOURI CITY

An early member of the Screwed Up Click, the brother of Macc Grace (once known as Dat Boy Grace) and a close friend of DJ Screw.

So you're the [basketball team] coach?

Yeah, I'm the head coach. See, I used to go to school for basketball. This is what I did, this was my thing. Then when I start havin' my boy—you know, I was fittin' to go to the NBA and all that, man, but my last year of college, I didn't go because I had my wife pregnant. So I came home to be a dad, take care of my business, know what I'm sayin'? Then when I came home, they tried to get me to go overseas and go to the Globetrotters, but I was like, "That's just like the NBA, too—I'm gonna be on the road all the time." So I ended up coming on back.

Where did you go to school?

I went to San Jac and then I went on to Colorado. I was All-American. McDonald's Second Team All-American. Basketball was my thing, bro. Music was just my fallback. I love music, but basketball was my first love, man.

So how old were you when you started playing?

Oh man, I've been playin' ball ever since I could walk right.

What neighborhood are you from, you and Grace?

We're from the Southwest. I played ball at Willowridge in Missouri City. Yeah, we from Mo City. We did our groundwork in Mo City and then we moved to the Southwest. My brother was fittin' to go to the MLB in baseball, man.

Grace was?

Yeah, he blew his knee out. He had blew his knee out and came back home. He was fittin' to go to the Cubs. Grace was a top-notch baseball player, man. He was fittin' to go to the Cubs because his roommate was a pitcher, too. He was going to the Cubs to pitch and my brother was going to play outfield. Yeah, Grace was a beast, man.

So what year was that, that you guys were in college? You guys are pretty close in age, right? You and Grace?

Yeah, we about three years apart. I graduated in '94 and my brother graduated in '91. We both graduated from Willowridge.

Growing up in Missouri City, were there a lot of resources like that, to keep kids out of trouble?

You know what our resource was? Our mom and dad, man. On everything. My mom and dad been married since ... forever. They was our coaches. That's why we do what we do now, because they *gave* back and gave us they *time*. That's all I know is family, man, so I felt like it was my responsibility to do the same thing they did for my boys. That's why my boys play on the team and my brother's boys play on the team. We're giving it back, doing this. A lot of people talk—say they do this, they do this ... but man, if you spend time and help these kids out, bro, it's more of a high than you can get on any type of drug when you helpin' some kids, man. It's like a natural high. It's just like a good, good feelin', man, to help these kids out. Because lot of these kids are a lot of *have*-nots. They don't have shit, they ain't got no daddy, they ... it's hard, but it's fair. And I just be tryin' to be there for them and show 'em a better way, you know what I'm sayin'? Show 'em a better way, man.

When did you start coaching?

I've been coaching for about the last six years. Yeah! This where all my time be, man. I coach football and basketball ...

What age are your boys right now?

One is my stepson, but I done had him since he was two, and he just graduated. He 18. 12 ... 9, and my other son just turned 3.

You mentioned coming up in Mo City and it sounds like you had some time in the streets here and there. What measures do you take to make sure that doesn't happen with them? It's gotta be a careful hand, right?

Yeah, it do, man. That's why I be so into it. People like, "Man, how you ever make time for yourself?" I say, "Man, this *is* myself makin' time. This my *kids*. That's the problem *y'all* not doin'. Y'all don't make no time." You know, everybody wanna do what they wanna do—go out, do this ... If I ain't in the studio or doin' a concert ... I don't even go to clubs no more unless I have a concert because I don't have *time*. All my time go to this basketball, man. *This* is where it's at because I'm trying to show these kids. You can *tell* 'em, but when you doin' it *with* them ... you know, you can tell anything, but when you *show* 'em, it's different. That's why all these kids respect me, a lot of these people respect me and what I'm doin', man. It's *hard*. You know, all this shit costs *money*. Your money and your time, and your time is one thing you can't get back. I practice Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, games on Saturday and games on Sunday. Two weeks ago, we had games in Beaumont. Just so happened we had a concert that same night. Me and my brother went and coached Friday, coached Saturday, concert Saturday night, then had a game Sunday morning. It's a nonstop grind, man.

Grace was locked up two years?

Grace was locked up five years.

Five years, man. Did you talk to [your sons] about that? Did that become kind of a lesson for them, things for them to learn?

Yeah, it did, man. It made 'em stronger, 'cause they *love* they uncle. Our family is like *tight*, you know what I'm sayin'? My boys and my brother's boys call each other brothers. They don't call each other cousins. They *always* together. So, when he was locked up, I was doing what he woulda did for me—I had his boys with me. So, when my brother get locked up, they just learned. It made us even tighter and bond even tighter. Like, "We gotta get it." 'Cause it's like—you not gettin' locked up for stupid shit. We just gettin' locked up to try to take care of our families, and better ourselves. It's not to go try to—you know, somebody people do what they do tryin' to shine and make theyself look good but man, we givin' back to these *kids*. And I try to shoot out to some of the homies, man, say, "Hey man—help out. You ain't doin' nothin' for your *own* kids. Help out these kids, man, I'm tryin' to help them out. Help me out. Help me help these kids." Some of them do. Some of them—a lot of them—say they gonna do something, they don't do shit, man. So I get to the phone. I just gotta make it happen, man, you know? I try my best to make it happen, man. It's a building block, but we make it work. We make it work.

It's huge, because you're building your community. You're building up things just beyond your family.

You feel me? Exactly, man. Exactly ...

You talk about how working with kids is a high. That's true for you, but the fact is also that athleticism, that exercise, is a high for them.

Yeah, man, I'm tellin' you. I got one kid, man, this kid mama just drops him off and leaves him at the gym. If that gym wasn't there, I don't know where this kid would be, you know what I'm sayin'? It's stuff like that that make me just wanna keep on doin' what I'm doin' because I'm *helping*. Not only am I helping my kids, and my nephews, but I'm helping the kids out in the community that *ain't got* nothin' else. Mama don't care, daddy—he don't even know where his daddy at, mama just droppin' him off and she do what she do, be gone all day. She don't pay for shit, she don't help out ... I know she have food stamps, she don't even try to go buy no Gatorade for the team. She don't do nothin' ... but my mom and dad, to this day, they still helpin' me and my brother out with this coachin' stuff. If I'm on the road and I need something, they got me. If I need some help for the players there, they got me. It's a trip, but that's how it is. I wouldn't change it—because I hear a lot of these rappers, my potnahs, they be a little better just because circumstances ... they had one hot song or one hot verse here or there, but they not doin' *nothing* to help give back!

I was talking to somebody about it this morning, and he was saying you know, that rap started out as a voice for different communities, and people in communities that didn't have a voice. Rap started out as a voice, for communities to fill that void. And now it's just turned into people being a voice for themselves, not for their communities or for helping out.

Yeah, for themselves, man.

How different do you think it would be if Screw was still around? Because people really learned from him, you know?

It would be so much different because there was one thing he did, man: He didn't talk it, he walked it. His heart is how he treated everyone. He treated everyone with love. There wasn't no jealous bone in his body, there wasn't none of that, man. It was nothin' but *love*. That's how me and my brother was raised up, and that's why Screw loved us like he did and called us his brothers. That's why he came to our house every Sunday with our mom and dad and we would have dinner. He wouldn't even *do* nothin' on Sundays but just chill as a family. We was tryin' to reach that out to everybody. Some people got it, some people did it for the moment, and once he gone people just started goin' here, there ... know what I'm sayin'? People say, "Why did Swishahouse do it but the Screwed Up Click didn't?" Because Swishahouse stayed together and they did the business part of it. We didn't do the business part. It's not like they better than us or we better than them—I don't even like to do that no more because people say you hatin'. It's not hatin', it's just the facts, man. Screwed Up Click is what *built* Houston, besides Rap-A-Lot Records. We was the next thing coming. We was everything everybody was mimicking ... but *we didn't take care of our business* right. We wasn't *on* the internet like Paul Wall and them. Of course, we had a lot of people gettin' incarcerated. Because we wasn't just rappin' just to be rappin' it. Most of the time what we was rappin' about was our *real* lives. Living that life situation, that's what happens. We would lose someone for two or three years here ... someone would get killed. That's just how it went, man, but it wouldn't be like it is now, man. Half of these people you wouldn't have never heard of. They'd probably be somewhere cuttin' grass or something. I don't know *what* they woulda been doin', they just wouldn't have been doin' no *rappin'*.

When you talk about losing somebody for two or three years here and there, and then you have the experience with your brother ... I'm curious about your thoughts on the prison industrial complex. It's a business ...

That's all it is, is a business. They plan is to lock you up and keep you there as long as they can so they can make money. It's all it is is a business. Just think of my brother being incarcerated for a five-year stretch. That ain't just nothin' you can just do on top of your head. That's a long damn time. Five years. You know, you can't get back time. You can't get that time back. So, it's just hard, man. Now Mike-D, he been gone for about two years. He and my brother, they ain't seen each other in about seven or eight years. It just be crazy, man. When my brother was locked up, Moe died, Hawk died, Pimp C died… all these people died when he was locked up. Pimp C was locked up when my brother was free, and so my brother got locked up, Pimp C got free.

And it hangs over people's heads.

Yeah. No doubt. No doubt, man. And I don't mean to be hatin', but the few people that did make it, they didn't reach out. Like right now, ain't nothin' goin' on in Houston really, as far as the *big* scene. They not really talkin' about us no more. But, if the people that was in the right position woulda said, "Hey…" introducing you to the right—it's all about who you know, and when you know the right people, you get into that mix. Because we've got talent, man. You know that. It ain't no way it's still not supposed to be… you know how it was three, four years ago, right when my brother got locked up, Houston got real hot. And he was gone. That loss right there—that really hurt *me.* I was emotionally like, "I don't even wanna mess with music no more." But when he came back, he lit the fire back under me. Because I was working on an album when he was locked up, but it was *deep.* I was like, "This album might be *too* deep for these people to even be able to relate to me." I get people to this day be like, "Man, why ain't you drop that?" I'll be like, "I don't know, man." I need to put it out there, though, man. I need to put it out there. But when my brother came home, everything he dropped, I was in there. *In* there. In the music, and just lovin' everything about music. Z-Ro had me in there workin' a little bit. Mike-D had me in there workin' a little bit, but there's nothing like working with my brother, you know what I'm sayin'?

When your brother got out of prison, I'd never seen anybody work that hard. Like with Pimp C…

Yeah, man, workin' nonstop. Nonstop, man. Nonstop. I wish Pimp C woulda been here. Because if Pimp C woulda been here when my brother came out, it woulda been different for us right now. It'd have been different right *now.* They was reachin' out to each other when my brother was locked up. He told my brother when he got out he ain't got nothin' to worry about, man. There just be so much goin' on that the world *don't know.* It just be crazy. The opportunities just got shut *down.* When Pimp C died, a lot of stuff died with him. When Screw died, a *whole bunch* of shit died with him. It's just a trip. It's just a trip, man. I just keep believin' in that man upstairs and just keep on pushin', man. Just keep on pushin', and just know it's gonna happen for us because we got it in this light. People who don't even know us be like, "Man, why are y'all not where y'all supposed to be?" I say, "Man, it's coming." Opportunities. It's just opportunities, man.

(2011)

Murder One

RAPPER · SOUTH PARK

Known as "Ronnie Luv" back in the day, Murder One was a participant in the rap contests of the late '80s and an early member of the South Park Coalition. A veteran now of multiple solo albums, he continues to make records and do shows around Houston to this day.

We were talking about the competition between rappers in the beginning days in Houston. You guys were right there with the pack, weren't you?

During that era we were all compressed in one club at the Rhinestone Wrangler. And that's where every artist, any group, we had to compete against each other. And at that time it was the home of Willie D—because Willie D was a solo artist before he got to the Geto Boys situation and he was one of the [artists] that Lil' J signed after the Geto Boys, before he even became a Geto Boy himself. So basically it was like every side—North, South, East, West—was tryin' to be the best rapper in town. There wasn't no beef or no, "You from the South, you from the North," or "You was on the mic longer." It was pure talent, and if you had talent you got credit for it. That was the type of era we was havin' at that time.

Seems like it really helped that there was just that one place for people to come to.

Well, yeah. I mean, the big venues. What I mean by big venues is that was like one of the major clubs at that time. You know, we had clubs inside the hood where you could ride your bike to it, to compete or whatever, but that was like the major place at that time, was like in '87. There was other places beside that but that was the place that ... if you had a Run-D.M.C. or an LL Cool J in town, they had to go through that club first.

So it was a big room, then?

Oh yeah it was a real venue. I mean it held a lot of people. I saw a lot of people based in New York. Basically, at that time there was more New York acts than anything else—besides the artists who was competing against each other.

Because most hip-hop was coming out of New York anyway.

In Houston, we made our own New York in many ways. We knew we wasn't too much getting accepted outside our area. So we made it what it is today.

What was South Park like before rap really took root there?

It was just…it was DJs and mixin'. It was, "What school got a party goin' on?" That was what it was before we had rap clubs. The DJs controlled everything. Because without the DJs we wouldn'ta knew the Run–D.M.C.s, the Kurtis Blows, all that like that. So at that time, before we got into it, to influence us to get into it was the DJs. At that time, who was hot in the business? Ice-T. Breakdancin'. That's all we knew right there—we had breakdancin' and the DJs. That controlled every party. And then the hip-hop came later.

The culture was already there.

Yeah the culture was there. Once the DJs set the tone for the culture it was obvious that rap was gonna be not too far behind it. You had the DJs and the breakers. Only thing missing was the MCs. By the time "Sucker MCs" came out, everybody and they mama wanted to rap then! That was the hottest thing that I'd heard.

Not to mention that it gave you, the youth, something constructive to do…

Yeah it gave us something to stay off the streets. Don't just go outside to sell drugs. At the time, I was playing football, N-I-P was a drum major, you know…people didn't know that. N-I-P was a drum major, I played football. It took away…it *gave* and it took away because I had two things I was doin'. I was rappin' and I was playin' ball. I took rap *over* ball 'cause I had a stronger passion for that. If it wasn't for Darryl Scott, I don't think none of us woulda been into hip-hop.

So how did the streets change after that?

It was one big party! Like I said, we already had the DJs and the breakers. We just needed the MCs. And that's how it changed. Before the MCs you had boys would ride down the street beatin' down the block. Everybody had 808 drum machines and we all came out there. You had boys playin' loud music with bass—BOOM! Beastie Boys, Run–D.M.C., that's all you heard. Whodini. People like that. So for us…we were like, "We need to get *played.* We need some of that airtime that these cars are playin'." And *that's* what brought the MCs together. And it was all lyrical. It wasn't all cosmetic like it is today. Everybody put a lot of makeup on they skills these days 'cause they figure they have to do that. They don't *have* to do that.

It's interesting because even the early stuff you guys were doing was telling what was going on in the streets even that early on…

And that's what you gonna get. In the '80s, we wasn't usin' profanity. That's the only difference.

Because you didn't feel like you could? Why?

Because everything that came out then…wasn't no profanity. If you didn't have lyrics, you didn't have anything. We'd depend on it back then. We would say, "Oh, that dude can really rap." It was more skills than anything else. And then in the era when N.W.A. and all them came, that's when the profanity got into the formula.

Do you feel like that helped it or hurt it?

I mean, you know, you got to change with time. So it benefited it because it kept the audience goin'. And anyone that *wasn't* cursin', had to do the cursin' to stay in the business.

What I think is really interesting are characters like Jukebox or Prince Johnny C, who were some of the original Ghetto Boys—once they went gangsta, those guys left. That's interesting because you guys were just telling it like you saw it anyway. Not necessarily glorifying it.

That's another form of "Good Times." Ain't we lucky we got 'em? That's what it is.

But you feel like what was being said in the lyricism of that period was pretty representative of what was going on?

Yeah, like today, if you listen to a K-Rino album or my album, Geto Boys album…not just us, I mean you know there are still rappers out here with morals. You know, 'cause people love the stories, and people love the passion of what they have been through or they are doing, and so you have somebody not glorify it, but at least let the world know, "This is what I'm doin' for mine."

So what do you think the next real movement will be in Houston?

It's goin' back to the '80s. The Murder Ones and K-Rinos and Street Militaries ... we fittin' to get our chance again. Not meanin' we out of the picture, but the real rappin' comes back into play. Everybody wantin' real rap. We hear it all the time. Not knockin' what boys do, don't get me wrong, I don't want people sayin' that. That's not true. It's just that ... how many times you can snap a finger? How many times you can do this dance? How can I indicate this kid that's growin' up in bad times right now ... that's what they want? We got our *kids* listenin' now. We just not gangsta rappers. There's a meanin' behind everything. Me and K-Rino got this song on my album called "Conversations With God." We askin' God, "Why is this? Why is that?" You know, answers ... questions that people wanna know ... let's change. What can you tell me to change? For our community. There's a lot of positive stuff that went in.

I asked K about this and he said, "You know, whether we like it or not, we're teaching them. We're teaching our youth."

We are.

Do you feel like they absorb it and appreciate, understand it for what it really is?

If we comin' real with it, they appreciate it. There's not a fan—I'ma ... snap my fingers and step with it ... what they gonna get out that? I'm not knockin' it. Everybody got a way of talkin'. My English ... I probably got the bad ... the worsest English you could really use, but in my rap form, you understand everything I just put on the table. And people accept that. Either you have older people ... right now I got people call me all the time 50, 40 ... almost 60-years-old ... "Y'all keep doin' what y'all doin'. I got my 14-year-old son listenin', my 13-year-old son listenin' to it." Like, "Y'all keepin' it real ... y'all tell it like it is," this and that. You know, that's why we do what we do. You can take money from me, you can take jobs from me, but you can't take the heart from me. When I got in this business it was passion. I didn't think about the money. I thought about money when it got to 2000. I been in the music game 20 years now.

(2008)

Point Blank

RAPPER · SOUTH PARK

Also known as The Bull, he came to Houston from Chicago in the early '90s and almost immediately met up with Dope E. of The Terrorists, who would go on to produce for him. Point Blank also crossed paths with K-Rino in the early days, becoming a part of the South Park Coalition and going on to form a group called Wreckless Klan with Ice Lord and fellow S.P.C. member PSK-13. He eventually signed with Russell Washington's Bigtyme Recordz, who released his debut Prone To Bad Dreams *in 1992.*

When did you first come to Houston?

Man, I was a young motherfucker. I can't remember, all I know is that I was going into the ninth grade. I came to Houston to go to high school.

You came from Chicago, right?

Yeah, I'm from the West Side of Chicago.

Were you rapping at all there? I guess that was a little young.

I mean, I was rappin'... my hood knew I knew how to rap. Anybody that came to my hood... I was a terror in my hood.

And when you moved to Houston, did you move right to the Southside?

When I moved to Houston, I got dropped right on in the Dead End off MLK. I used to stay in King Gates Apartments, but they don't call them King Gates no more. I went to Sterling High School, which—K-Rino attended Sterling High School. I got dropped in South Park. That's the first hood I entered, and... shit, I still rep it today to the fullest, you dig?

There's kind of a mythology. South Park is really kind of a magical place for a lot of people. Did you feel that right away?

It was real. You know, I was straight from the Chi, but... it was right with my agenda. I felt right at home.

Who did you meet first out of all those guys?

Dope E. [a.k.a.] Murdoq. He was the one I used to run into all the time. You know, tryin' to get in where I fit in. S.P.C. already had a flag up. I was straight from the Chi, gettin' it in, learning my way through. Me and Dope E. used to run into each other all the time. I was tryin' to get beats from him and shit. You know, he did beats for *everybody* at that time. And we just ran into each other all the time. We ended up moving into the same apartment complex. We both was in the same leasing office, gettin' our leases and keys to apartments, so it was just *meant* for me and Dope to fuck around.

And he produced some of first stuff you were rapping on in Houston?

Yeah, *Prone To Bad Dreams,* my first album. Dope E. of The Terrorists produced all that. Him and Egypt E.

I got the tape. It's got a Houston side and Chi-Town side.

Yeah, no doubt. I was like fresh on deck. Pimp C did one track on that album, "Cut You In Half." And Dope E. did all the rest of it.

And what year was that? That was '90, '91 ... something like that?

Yeah, we probably was doin' the recordin' in '91, but it ain't come out 'til '92. And when I got locked up, when I got out of jail me and Dope E. hooked up. And he really did my whole record.

Were you with those guys early enough to where they were still doing battle raps? This was still in high school, with those guys?

Yeah, K-Rino was in high school. Like I said, I was in Sterling. You know, I saw K-Rino from *afar*. If you wanted to do some music, you had to know who K-Rino was. Hell, I went to Sterling High School and that was the school he went to, so them niggas used to hook up in the bathroom all the time. I used to go in there and watch them niggas, but I never got involved in the battles or nothin'. I was just back observin', and watching K-Rino eat niggas' ass up in the bathroom. I even talked to him about this and let him know some of the days I went ... when I didn't know him, when I wasn't friends with him. I knew who he was, but I wasn't introduced to him. But when I was going to that school, *everybody* respected K-Rino. I used to go in the bathrooms when they went in the bathrooms. K-Rino used to wreck shit. He used to be at the talent shows, and I used to be at all that shit, but you know, nobody knew who I was at the time. I was an underdog on the rise.

There was stuff going on in the skate rinks and everything at that point, right?

Yeah, it definitely was going down, and Ganxsta N-I-P, you know, he was the king of the swing. He was hot in the clubs. You *got* to hear about Ganxsta N-I-P, know what I'm sayin'? South Park was really holding it down, you know, Scarface, Geto Boys ... of course, you know, they at the top of the rankings, but the South Park Coalition *was* in the mix.

Do you remember the first time you heard N-I-P, or you saw N-I-P?

Well, like I said, I used to run into *all* of 'em from fuckin' with Dope E. But you know, me and N-I-P real encounters was in this club called 808. They used to call it Infinity. It was a hood club in South Park. It was really goin' down in that motherfucker back then. So me and N-I-P used to get it in, with me and N-I-P, man, we just connected. Me and N-I-P got down for a long time.

Is that who you started performing with early on, when you were doing shows?

I wasn't doin' no shows yet. I *did* go on tour with N-I-P, after we was already in the mix, already family. At the beginning, I used to go do little talent shows and contests up at that club. N-I-P used to *rule* at the club. When I got to the club, N-I-P ran all that shit. He would win everything and all that. So, he was kinda retired when I got there, as far as bein' in the contest, because he already was the king of that motherfucker. But I end up gettin' in it one night and I end up *winnin'* that bitch. That was at Club 808.

808 was right over by King's, right?

Yeah, it was over in that area. Even Scarface used to be in this bathroom I'm talkin' about. That's just something we used to do. When we got to the club, some of the rappers, we'd end up in the bathroom together. I end up in there rappin' one time and Scarface was in there listenin' to me rap. We all used to get up in that motherfucker and get down, in the bathroom, kickin' some hard ass flows in the bathroom of the club.

So what year did you go on tour with N-I-P?

I went on tour with N-I-P when he was with Rap-A-Lot. On one of them albums—the album that got "Small Town Killas" on it. Whichever album that N-I-P dropped that got "Small Town Killas" on it [*Psychotic Genius*]. Geto Boys had a tour. It was all Rap-A-Lot. Geto Boys, Scarface, Fifth Ward Boyz, Ganxsta N-I-P… and I think they had them dudes from Cali… Menace Clan.

After that record came out, and N-I-P had featured a lot of you guys on that record, that's how a lot of people found out about the South Park Coalition and brought in a new audience, right?

That's right. I still was fresh on deck in South Park. When I won my contests, and started gettin' my own crowd, my own thing, N-I-P came to me and told me he wanted me to be on this song called "Rough Brothers From South Park." He was already gettin' it in with his record. He told me he wanted me to be on that song, so I got on it.

And your album [Prone To Bad Dreams] *came out after that or before that?*

It was after that. I don't think I even had no record yet. I was plantin' my feet. I hadn't even met Bigtyme yet, to even have no record deal.

Is that the only record you did on Bigtyme?

Nah, I did *Prone To Bad Dreams*, *What Is The World*, *In The Door*, *Bad News Travels Fast*, *Wreckless Klan.* I did a lot of albums on the Bigtyme label.

And you started your own label.

Yeah, I had started Wreckless Entertainment and I still currently got Wreckless Entertainment, but my current label now is Money Fam Ink. That's the new movement.

That's your label or the label that you're on?

Nah, it's my label, but at the end of the day… I got an artist named Money Fam Dre. That's where the Money Fam name even came from. So, at the end of the day, I'm leaving the cap hangin', but I gotta say, it's all our label, you dig what I'm sayin'? 'Cause we a family. I ain't makin' no moves that don't nobody know about. I'm just like president of the shit, CEO of the shit, but it's all a family situation. It ain't nothin' happenin' without the other one.

Because it becomes a movement that way. You promote all the artists at once.

Money Fam is the movement. Money Fam Dre is from Texas City. Over the past year, I've just been workin' him in, just tryin' to introduce him to my fans, and create him a market for his self, you know what I'm sayin'? I got a lot of artists, and I try and teach 'em to grind, man. That shit don't just come to you. You gotta… I show these niggas. I don't just talk. I get out here and *do*. Niggas gotta get out here and do what I do. I'm out here in the trenches in this shit… I'll travel all over the world. I don't give a fuck.

Does it take a lot to get the young guys to understand that?

I mean, I ain't got no bunch of energy, man. I got kids and I take time to be teachin' my kids, but if there's somebody that I feel worth the knowledge I got to give 'em and worth the game I got to give 'em and show them to open their eyes to, then I'll give 'em that time if they askin' for it and they *wanna* do it. But a lot of people just want the *fun*. They want all the fun and shit what come with the situation, and this shit is hard work. This shit ain't easy, runnin' around gettin' motherfuckers to buy your music and all that shit. It ain't like they goin' in the store to get your music. They buy it because they see you out, representin', bein' a real individual. I go city to city, state to state, town to town whether they know I'm comin' or not. I done been way to Australia. Seven cities out the trunk, all in Australia.

Do you still tour a lot?

Yeah, I still tour a lot, man. I just did a show last night with Big Pokey in Houston. At a club called 6324 in the hood at 610 and MLK at an after hours spot. It was that boy Knock's birthday, from Herschelwood Hardheadz. We all was up there 'til about five in the mornin'… I'm *on* the road, I'm headed toward East Texas. I just left Huntsville, now I'm workin' my way to Madisonville, and I'ma go through all the 'villes. Probably go through Dallas, and get up on 20, go through Marshall… there ain't no tellin', man. Gonna make me a 360.

So what do you do, you have neighborhoods that you hit or you hit record stores? Where do you go?

I hit everything when I hit a city. If there's a record store exists I'm at it. I'm in the hood, I'm wherever real niggas at. That's why you don't see me, because motherfuckers can't go where I go. If they say, "It's hot over there," that's where the fuck I'm at, because that's where I gotta be to *get* mine. Everybody can't go where I go. This travelin' shit dangerous. It's a dangerous job, brother. Can't no pussy ass nigga do it.

Do you go mostly in Texas, or to Louisiana, as well?

I go Louisiana—all over, man. I got fans everywhere. I'm all in the streets of Alexandria, Lake Charles… I be all in the small towns… Crowley and Ennis… all over Louisiana I got love. I get a lot of money in The Boot.

What are the shows out there like, when you go out there and perform?

I ain't did no shows in The Boot, but the streets, you know, accept me. They *been* acceptin' me. My music classic out there in Louisiana and they still buyin' my new shit. I ain't did no shows out there, but you know, I stay in the streets out there and keep myself in they face and stay relevant. I think they *was* playin' me in Lake Charles on the radio station. They was playin' "Make Doing Bad Look Good," "My Mind Went Blank," and shit like that. You never know where they playin' you at, man. But you know, I'm in the street with this shit.

What's your new album going to be called?

[It's called] *No Money, No Reason.*

And when's it going to come out?

It'll come out soon as God want it to come out. When everything in order and everything where it need to be, blessings come running my way and everything happen the way it need to be whenever it's *meant.* Whenever it's time. It's being worked on, it's being mixed, new things happening every day. Tour's all ready. If a situation come my way, I'm ready to get down, but I'ma put it out when the time is right, man.

Back in the day, early on, when Prone To Bad Dreams *came out and everything like that, would you go do the shows in smaller towns like that or would you just kind of stick around Houston? Aside from the tours.*

I did whatever they had hooked up. I wasn't doin' what I'm doin' now. If I was doing what I'm doing now *then*, I'd be rich already.

So when did you start doing this, the approach where you're going to all of the small towns and everything?

After my last [stint in the penitentiary], after I got out and just started gettin' more serious, runnin' my own shit when I went to deal with [the record production and distribution facility] Southwest [Wholesale] and just came back a different person.

What year was that?

I think it was 2001.

2001 is when you got out?

Yeah.

How long were you locked up?

Almost three years. I got locked up soon as *Bad News Travels Fast* dropped! I was in jail, and I put a whole lot of work and money in that record. I got locked up, I didn't even see it released!

What did you get locked up for?

Shit… fuckin' around in the streets, man. Fuckin' with them drugs. Got caught with some Sherm, got caught with a couple of strats. I just was reckless back then, to be honest. I'm a different person now. You gotta watch what you do out here and how you do it. Got caught up with a drug case and pickin' up… I had caught a weed case in Baton Rouge, in Louisiana. I just was reckless, picking up felony cases everywhere, had to pay these motherfuckin' lawyers, takin' all my motherfuckin' money. And, you know, still ended up gettin' some time and shit like that. Had to wake up. You know, God just had to stop me for a minute.

And when you got out, you were a different person, 2001?

Yeah, no doubt. A whole new man with a whole new plan. Like I said, when I got out, I had stopped fuckin' with Southwest. I had stopped fuckin' with Robert Guillerman. When I did *Bad News Travels Fast*, I really was already—I had records out myself. Robert Guillerman wasn't givin' me the money I wanted 'cause I guess he ain't feel like I was ready to just have the shit, so we pulled Russell [Washington] back in since Russell was the one puttin' my records out. I did it 'cause I had more control, but it still had "Bigtyme WK" on that *Bad News Travels Fast* record. That really was all *my* action. Russell got pulled in, and I just… I end up lettin' it happen…

Did you take a hit when Southwest went down?

Hell yeah I took a hit. I had about 75 G's up there. And was fittin' to pick up 25. I mean, at the end of the day, every time I went up there to get some money thinkin' it's gonna be one thing, it always be less. But at least, every month—every other month or whatever, you pick up 10, 5, whatever, you know… depends on who it is. The money varies. Plenty of people got big paper from up there. I used to pick up some nice checks from up there, but you got 8, 9, 15, 16, 17 G's comin' in, then now when you still doin' what you doin'—that's a big ass help, bro.

What sunk Southwest?

I don't know. I guess they got in over they heads with the shit they was doin'. Tryin' to cover that money and file bankruptcy on that shit. I don't even know what kind of corruption was goin' on up there. All I know is that it affected our whole Southwest region. It ain't affect niggas like me, 'cause I get out in the streets and they buyin' my shit. So, when they stop doin' that shit, I was still out here gettin' it in and niggas had to get out and try to do what *I* was doin', to get money! But I was already used to *doin'* it. I already was out here doin' it, so… the only thing I missed was gettin' them big checks every now and then.

Right, but you knew what you wanted to do anyway. You knew how you wanted go about it.

Exactly. I do the best I can with what I got, man. I ain't got shit good to say about this guy. His game ain't shit. At the end of the day, you do the best you can with what you got, be thankful for what you get. Man, I've *raised my kids* doin' this shit. I live off the rap. I don't work no job and rap, I don't sell no dope and rap—I don't do shit I used to do and rap. Blood, sweat and tears, I'm out here gettin' money with this shit. Sometimes, we had the seats back, sleep in the motherfuckin' car—with money in our pockets. It's by choice, not by force. Tryin' to make every dollar we can. We travel around this motherfucker and rake every motherfuckin' city we go to, top to bottom. Then we go to the next one and do the *same* motherfuckin' thing. And so on and so on. Oklahoma, it don't fuckin' matter. Every-motherfuckin'-where. I might pop up *any*-motherfuckin'-where and blow a motherfuckin' mind. "Man, what you *doin'* here?" Gettin' it in.

(2011)

Dope E. of The Terrorists

RAPPER · SOUTHSIDE

A.k.a. Murdoq, he is the founding member of The Terrorists, who released their debut album on Rap-A-Lot in 1992. He is an original member of the South Park Coalition, and has produced many tracks for Ganxsta N-I-P, K-Rino, and Point Blank, to name a few. He now lives in Austin, and still records under all of his aforementioned names.

You're someone to speak on The Illuminati.

No doubt, yeah. You know, it's … I mean, as far as the name and what they doin', you know that, again, that whole thing is funded with the people that have the *paper*, you know? Those are the so-called … they control the music, you know? They control the sports league, entertainment league. They perform at high levels spending our money. And then again, all of that's a part—that's the reason why they are well-liked, you know? "Illuminati" is like the *mature* name or the latest name we have. I mean, really, once you go back you'll get to Bohemian Grove, you know? It's where over 1,000 globalists hook up every so often, you know, three, four months or whatever. In Sonoma, California is like one of their places where they hook up and do they little meetings. But Bohemian Grove'll switch to … you know, as you continue to go back it'll switch to Skull and Bones, and Skull and Bones goes all the way back. Skull and Bones is the affiliation *of* the Illuminati. Like it's all controlled by the same entity. And so that's like my research on it. It's not just this new group of people that's doing this or, you know, that's in the music business or whatever, the entertainment field and controlling stuff … it's like …

Entertainment's just one small part of it.

Exactly. You know, they start recruiting back in high school. I remember myself—you know, me goin' to an all-white school, I remember drawing skulls, skull-head, skull and bones, and I remember takin' that to K-Rino. I remember this shit. I said, "You want some hard shit, some gangsta shit? This need to be the logo. It's gonna be South Park Coalition with that shit sittin' there." And he's like, "Uh … nah, nah." But we still said we didn't like the skull head and the bones—like, we didn't know *why* we didn't like 'em, we just based our teenaged opinions on shit. It's like they start recruiting *then*. That's why a lot of 'em, like I say, is highly *prestigious*. It's nothing little. You know, you got your little … I'm talkin' about the players that graduate from Princeton, that are known to go to Yale … it starts on the local level, it starts on the city level, all the way up to the Federal level. That's where the Federal—that's the "big boys" as they say—that's where the fascism starts to hit at, and that driving force *is* the Illuminati. That's the so-called name of it in entertainment. So that's just one small portion because the Jesuits—the Jesuits control the Illuminati! So it's like... where does it stop? It stops where your knowledge is. It stops where you think that it exists at and the name *you* learned it is. But it's a lot of names.

What it comes down to is how it affects you in what it puts out there, and what does it put out there? It puts things out there that decay the community, putting things out there that are bad for the community. You're talking about it being in control of entertainment, and music being—especially rap music—being dumbed down to the point that it is, it's like saying, "Now I see that you're in control of this, now I see what you're doing with it."

Exactly. Like I said, man, we're talking about the latest, latest phase... like when you're a child. And we'll both agree as a child, that's the *easiest time* for you to get deceived. The *easiest* time. Because you hadn't went through any experience, you don't know anything... if my uncle—and I stayed with my uncle—9-years-old I was stayin' with him, and he was asleep in the back. And then somebody came off the street, "Hey man, your uncle there?" "Nah, he's asleep." "Okay, hey—go in there and get five pounds outta there. We had already talked about it. And bring them to me. I gotta take 'em to Louisiana, flip 'em and bring 'em back. Don't wake him up." And I go in there and get them pounds, and go give 'em to him. And I find out later he's all, "What happened to my pounds?" "Larry came by." He said, "No don't do that shit!" And let's say... well, it doesn't matter—I was gonna say, "What if I'm 16..." but it doesn't *have* to be like that. Let's just say I'm still 9 and it *happens again.* "Okay, well shit... you're gonna have to wait 'til my uncle wake up, Larry. I can't do that no more. I got in trouble, man. That's not right." See, you've been *introduced* to it. So all I'm saying, is as a child, we're introduced to all these evil depictions and images that's perpetuated on television... you know, *all over* the radio. And how do I know? Because I remember my mother telling me to get out the room several times, or plug my ears when the radio's playing, or cover my eyes when the TV's going... and the separation between that is we're still being introduced to negative weight. Humans aren't responsible for a higher power as they bring negativity and then they say, "Hey, you know, you have to, you know, take this television guide, this remote and program the certain stations." Now are you responsible for that, watching your child? No, no we're not. Just take it off completely. Let's say they wanna stop drinking, but they don't pass the law and say, "Don't get caught drinkin' and driving." Just take it off the streets, man. Just take it out the stores, stop the distribution, shut the fuckin' companies down. But they stir it up to make it seem like responsible—so they're making us control their negativity that they are creating. Who am I saying "they?" You could say "Illuminati," but I'm sayin' when I was a child, so did the Illuminati exist back then? That's why the name is just a new name or whatever, because when I was 4 or 5, I'm steady lookin' at *Sanford and Son*, I'm lookin' at *Good Times*, you know, I'm lookin' at these TV stations, sitcoms that I'm trusting, and I am getting my views from that, and I'm patterning my thoughts and my life and my actions after these TV shows that are on television. That is a *fact.* People don't wanna say that, but it's a fact.

(2010)

B-1

RAPPER · MISSOURI CITY

B-1 is a lesser known member of the South Park Coalition who was there from the early days on the Southside in the late 1980s.

When did you get involved with the South Park Coalition?

I'd say it's been about 11 years now since I've been an actual *member*. And I've probably been rapping since … I've been rapping since '91. But I finally got serious I'd say about '95.

You started rapping in '91—that's when those guys were all releasing a lot of records, or starting to. Were you kind of idolizing those guys growing up? Were they big stars to you?

You know, I wouldn't say that they was big stars, but they was … I definitely looked up to them and idolized them in some form, but they was more my … street homies, O.G.s, more on the like … brother level because we was in the hood together. And you know, they're a little bit older than me, so I was just the young nigga hangin' around. I was the young homie hanging around. I had no business bein' out, but I was out bein' *wild*. I say was out bein' *wild*, drinkin' beers and doin' all kinda other stuff I ain't had no business doin'. I was smokin' up a lot of game, but shit, it coulda always been worse.

How old are you now?

I'm 33.

So you're almost 10 years younger than some of those guys. Kind of a different generation there.

Just a little bit, just a little bit. But not too much. I'm gonna be 34 this year, so … I think actually when I was in the fifth grade—actually it was like in the ninth grade, something like that, they was probably just getting to high school when I was just fittin' to go to middle school. I was in elementary.

So how did you meet those guys?

You know what? Well, I met [K-Rino] at Michael Dell's crib. He used to come through with Pharoah, 'cause you know Pharoah's from South Park. So Pharoah used to bring him through, and everybody bein' out there was kickin' it with the beats, freestylin' and rappin'. Like I say, they was right around the corner, so I was goin' and hangin' out, gettin' entertained and I was ... my brother and Crazy C was real good friends, so that's how I really, really just got caught on to it because Crazy C and Icey Hott used to DJ at a lot of house parties in the hood. So as we was coming up I just naturally gravitated to that genre. I took a liking to it because I felt like, you know, they was my people and they was accessible and they was giving me a lot of game and knowledge at that time. So that's how we took it and rolled. And that was in the late '80s. Maybe '87. Yeah, about '87. that's when I probably first met Icey Hott. I probably met [K-Rino] about three years later ... and all the rest of them fools.

So when you were growing up in Missouri City, was South Park kind of a place to go? Was it a destination?

Shit, it was the main place to go! Hell yeah, because Hiram Clarke was in between South Park and Mo City, so pretty much ... you know, it wasn't ... 288 wasn't even built yet, so we was takin' a ride on them backstreets through Hiram Clarke to get to South Park to get the music and to come buy weed and you know, go to the Sokol Village and the Boomerang and all that kind of shit. So yeah, eventfully, it was the place to be.

Where was the place you would go? I mean where was the ... was King's Flea Market around then?

King's Flea Market, Trading Fair II, and Sokol Village, before it turned into Boomerang, them was the main places—I'm talking about we got hands on steering wheels, that's what we was goin' off with. Go get some clothes from the flea market or go get some jewelry or somethin' and try to hit the club and get us some girls and catch [K-Rino] and [Street Military] and them in concert, or Too Short or MC Ren or whoever Wickett Crickett and them was bookin', we was tryin' to be there.

Trading Fair, man, that place was fucking crazy. I remember going in that place.

Hell yeah. Crazy. We'd come in there and be havin' a couple hundred dollars tryin' to getcha a b-boy chain with ... with a fresh edge up and you ... you was *ready.*

So what was Boomerang called before?

It was called Sokol Village.

And that was over off OST, or Griggs?

It was off of ... you know, it was actually off of 610 and Cullen, and it's on Cullen and Holmes ... Cullen and Holmes Road intersect.

I've seen the building ...

Yeah, that building. They done switched that building up now. That's where it ... that's where it used to *be*, boy. *The* spot.

And you could get in there being underage and everything, they didn't care?

Nah, you know what? It wasn't so much that everybody could get in there underage, but it was 'cause we knew—'cause we knew [Icey Hott] and we knew K-Rino, you know, and Klondike and shit ... they never really asked us for ID and shit. They just took us bein' down with the fam, or bein' somebody little cousin, little brother. That's how we used to get in. They didn't have a lot of underage—you had to be 18 to get in, 21 to drink.

What else were you listening to then? Mostly Houston stuff or national rap?

I was definitely listening to *all* rap, but I was probably more inspired by the local thing. You know, I was feelin' like if they could do it and make a way then we can do it the same way. But shit, I was listening to everything, man, Eric B. & Rakim, Big Daddy Kane, Ice Cube, N.W.A., Eazy-E, a little bit of The Dayton Family, MC Breeze, Tupac, and then pretty much when the ... I would have to say the turning point in all that shit was when Mr. Scarface dropped the first Scarface song? Oh it was over, bro. When Scarface dropped "Mr. Scarface," and the Geto Boys came out with "City Under Siege," and got on Rap-A-Lot, and Ganxsta N-I-P signed to Rap-A-Lot, oh it was over. It was all ... it was gettin' real H-Town, baby, after that.

See that's specifically why I asked you that, because I know that, and K-Rino told me a story that was very much like that ... when that song broke, he said, people just freaked out, and every club you would go in every *night, you would hear that song. And people would go nuts every single night. And he said that's when it changed.*

No doubt, and see that was the thing—like, you know, he might be eight years older than us and then he was with my brother and Crazy C and them, so we wasn't feelin' *too* much younger, but we was younger. But because we was mature for our age and we was around, you know, we used to get away with shit. But you know, [K-Rino] and them was doin' they thing and [Icey Hott] and them was doin' they thing on the music industry with the tapes, and it was bumpin' and they was rockin' the parties and shit. And when that "Scarface" had dropped and Too Short and all that shit ... when Scarface was down and he was talking about South Park living, and was gettin' *attention?* It's like ... it's just like everything changed, people's perspective within ... boys started gettin' *feared.* Studios ... like Crazy C was DJing parties, and him and DJ Aggravated, and Lil' Troy—'cause the connection ... you know, if you go back far enough in Mo City, and Ridgemont—Ridgemont kinda turn into Hiram Clarke, and if you go back a little bit farther, you'll be on the outskirts of South Park. So that's what made our little shit connected, and Crazy C and [Icey Hott], they was DJin' parties one day and the next thing you know they was just makin' beats. And they started makin' them beats, and them beats was *jamming*, and there wasn't a lot of ... like they went straight from them goddamn mixtapes to them beats. There wasn't too many demos or none of that shit. Like, they first couple of demos, them motherfuckers was for *sale* shortly thereafter.

That really got people on the Southside going and really thinking and moving, huh?

Yeah, really it was the whole of H-Town because, you know, [J Prince] was from Fifth Ward, so it wasn't a lot of ... it wasn't no bias at this point. It was just all H-Town ... Fifth Ward, Northside, because ... *everybody* got family on the Northside, so it wasn't no thing, you know what I'm sayin'? But that shit just sparked the fuel ... the shit all happened so fast, you know? One day we listenin' to "Scarface," and them boys on the little 12-inch singles and about a year, year and a half later, [J Prince] comin' through soupin' niggas up ... hand-washing your cars and shit, know what I'm saying? Got all them dope fiends hand-washing your cars and shit. Got all them dope fiends hand-washing and hand-detailing and they got all them trying to block the street off and make it one-way traffic to where you couldn't make U-turns or be turnin', and then by 12–1 o'clock, [the police will] be sitting out there in they cars and they horses just *waitin'* to harass people.

Where was the car wash, exactly?

You know—the car wash on MLK, right at MLK and Kassarine, that was the car wash that everybody used to go to and get they cars washed and floss up and down MLK. The slabs, all swangin', poppin' trunks and you know, whatever.

I remember for the Kappa in Galveston, there would be a line two or three miles long just waiting to get into that car wash, all night long.

You know what? The amazing shit about [the] car wash on MLK ... that car wash ain't got but goddamn probably but four big stalls, and there'll be a lot of dope fiends up there hand-washing your car. So that's what pretty much switched it up, and then Screw had moved from South Park to Mo City, so when he had moved and then they cracked down on a lot of them streets and them houses with the activity. That's what, you know, kinda slowed up ...

It is a lot slower now, but do you still see an area where people go? I mean there are the record stores ... people still go to Screw's shop, Timmy Chan, King's Flea Market. I mean, there are still places like that, right?

The Screw Shop is a fa sho ... that's like a guarantee ... if that motherfucker closes, it's gonna get ugly. Screw shop, Timmy Chan's, and people go to King's Flea Market to get they music done. People still go to BAM's. There's a lot of people still go to BAM's to get they car washed, you know, that's still a focal point. MacGregor Park has started picking up, probably here in about the last four or five years with new activities and shit, and a lot of hangin' and chillin'. But them goddamn cops, man, they come out there trying to write some tickets, and that shit keep people away. You know, it don't take but one or two times for you to come out there and get pulled over and motherfuckers ain't really comin' through, but yeah, it's still ... it used to be poppin'! You know what I'm talking about? It used to be severely poppin'. You would have people from the Northside, Southwest just ... ridin' to the Screw shop, ridin' to Timmy Chan's, MacGregor Park, makin' laps and shit. And now, it's more so the natives. If you born and raised out here ... you know, Hiram Clarke or Third Ward ... you know, that immediate locale, I would say.

So when you first started working on your own rapping, putting together tracks and that sort of thing, who did you first start working with as far as producing?

My first little dude I was fuckin' with was Black Mike. You familiar with Black Mike?

I've never met him but I know the name.

Black Mike was *cold*. Like Black Mike was ahead of his time, and so ... I had more of a relationship with Street [Military] and The [Killa] Klan and S.P.C. than Black Mike, but I was trying to put him all ... you know, with the music, with them, and they wasn't really ... I wouldn't really say they wasn't *takin'* to him as much, but he was so caught up on his self, trying to get his solo thing off that when the shit didn't start [to] work that's when I start getting serious and people start likin' my rhymes so me and him started as a *group*. And he was the primary producer for about the first ... three, four years. And then we met Rakesh.

What was your group called?

The Network. We was called The Gangsta Network.

The Gangsta Network.

Yeah, we was all about networkin' with the gangstas.

Right on. And where were those guys from? Were they from South Park or were they from Mo City?

They was from Mo City. They was from Mo City. You know what it was was that, you know Lil' Flea wasn't ... we went to the same high school with Lil' Flea, and because everybody was linkin' up with South Park, Pharoah and Flea and [Icey Hott] and them formed Street Military, so everybody was behind Flea in the whole thing. And you know Street Military was composed of people from South Park and Mo City, so that's why I say it wasn't really a ... you know, there wasn't really no plex or there wasn't no discrepancies, so to say.

Were all those guys from Mo City? Street Military?

Nah, KB from the Northside, Icey was from Hiram Clarke, Flea from Mo City and Pharoah was from South Park.

What about Nutt? The one that died?

Yeah Nutt was from Mo City. That's why it was so much *connection*, because they had members from all parts of the city, so you had no choice but to accept them. And then the Geto Boys had Willie D from Fifth Ward, and the Northside, with Trinity Garden Cartel was comin' out, so it wasn't a Northside/Southside thang, it was a Houston thang. You know, and ... shit, that's what it was ... me and Black Mike, we was from Mo City, and after school—right after high school we had started makin' a little noise in the hood and shit and they was tryin' to make a movie about Fifth Ward ...

No shit?

Yeah, and we was tryin' to get on the soundtrack, and we ended up meetin' Rakesh. You know who Rakesh is? Well, I'm sayin' Rakesh but his name is Rak. He produced the first Z-Ro album and the first Guerilla Maab album. That's when we *really* got in the studio and got with it hard. And because we was younger we were still honin' our craft. You know, Murder One and Dope E. and them, they was just schoolin' us on the aspects 'cause they was already ... you know, by that time they were celebrities. Definitely by then. They was definitely celebrities by then.

Who did you come the closest to? I mean who had the biggest influence on you personally?

Ah man it was … initially, no bullshit, Ganxsta N-I-P and Point Blank. 'Cause you know Ganxsta N-I-P was doin' that *writin'* … he was doin' the writin' for the Geto—for Bushwick and shit, also on a lot of Bushwick's shit 'cause he was on Rap-A-Lot. They had dropped so simultaneously that it just took us all … it took everybody by storm and really it was Ganxsta N-I-P that kinda rocked me so hard. At first. I had done already heard [K-Rino] on mixtapes and shit … but what took it for me was Ganxsta N-I-P because this is the only person I've ever seen … I'll say this: This was the first person that I seen walk in the club, walk in the DJ booth and just rock the whole muthafuckin' club *live.* Dead in the middle of prime time—I'm talking about 1:15 in the morning, "Well we got Ganxsta N-I-P in the house, he 'bout to do his brand new single." And man, that man mixed that record in, and it was just like he was on wax, and Ganxsta N-I-P was in the booth *live!* I swear to god he was rockin' that bitch in living color, and that was … I think that was in like '93?

And where was that? Was that at Boomerang?

Nah, it was at Carrington's. He was promotin' his new album.

Carro's.

Carro's was the spot. And that was for the sho 'nuf slab riders. Sokol Village and Boomerang was more of a hood spot, so to say. They was doin' a lot of shows at that motherfucker, but Carrington's was just like … like the regular club.

Was it a little bit more upscale?

It was the same thing, but it was more flossy and flashy. A lot of parkin' lot pimpin', you know, and it was 21 to get in. You had to be 21 to get into Carro's. You could be 18 and get into Boomerang and shit. That was pretty much the difference. Probably more … probably more big time dope dealers as opposed to hood dealers.

(2010)

Minister Robert Muhammad

MOSQUE NO. 45, HOUSTON, TEXAS

A member of the Nation of Islam and a longtime advisor to some of the subjects interviewed in this book. The interview was conducted on the road.

I know that you've had a lot of contact with K-Rino, Justice Allah and figures like that over the years. How did those guys get in touch with you? How did you come together?

I became a student minister here in Houston, Texas on July 1, 1987, and the first building in which I was—that we used for our meeting place—was on Brandon and Scott, right there in Sunnyside. We moved from there in 1990 to Cullen. Cullen Boulevard, right there in what's called Foster Place, what some would consider Sunnyside. So it has always been the place I hold my ministry to because that's where I got started. That being said, what middle schools and high schools are in that area? You of course have got Cullen Middle School, which is over there on Scott, you have over … you've got Worthing, you've got Sterling further down MLK …

Jones …

Jones High School, St. Lo off of MLK. So, being that I'm in that community, I know these children. I would run into them as I would be speaking at different schools, or different events, or vigils. In fact, that's where I met Quanell X. He was a high school student at Worthing. So it was a natural environment that I would know people from the South Park Coalition, from South Acres, from Sunnyside, and from Third Ward. So that's how I come to know them, and they come to know me.

I know that you've got a background in urban planning … your association with MTZ and your consulting firm and everything like that, you know a great deal about city planning and that sort of thing. As far as the history of South Park—why was it planned where it was?

Well if you look at actually outside of the 610 Loop, at one time everything outside of the 610 Loop was considered suburbs. [*laughs*] When you go over 610 between Cullen and MLK, and you look at that street or that subdivision over there, you'll find it has a lot of World War I *names.* Of places or cities that are associated with World War I. So that community *actually* has little to do with, really, black people. These places that we consider the suburbs once were where Caucasians and Jews lived. I'll give you an example: Ezekiel Cullen Junior High School was a place—that area actually was where a lot of Jewish people lived. Riverside. Along North and South MacGregor. Jewish people were not allowed to live in River Oaks. They lived *there* first, because you'll find some old churches, even in Third Ward were actually old synagogues! In fact, the church right across the street from—I don't know what they call it now but it used to be called the Contemporary Learning Center—right there at… I wanna say Blodgett. Blodgett and Almeda. There's a high school there, with a park that's next to it. Right there, there's a church, right in the middle of the block, or down the street from Almeda, one block east of Almeda right there on Blodgett. Look at it and you'll see the Star of David right up in the entrance. It used to be a synagogue. So what I'm saying to you is, is that there was a time when black people couldn't be caught south of Alabama [Street] past sundown. It was a white area, South Park was. That was considered the suburb. We moved *out* that way, and when we moved out, others moved out. They went further out. Then Jewish people began moving out on Braeswood, and other places. When we began to integrate, they moved out.

And what era was that during?

This was like the '70s. Going into the '80s. Late '70s, early '80s… late '60s, early… all of the '70s and the '80s, they began *leaving* out of what you would consider… what you *think* is in the city, *really* used to be the suburbs.

Right.

I'll give you another example. Where you find 45? The Pierce Elevated? Particularly over there by U of H? Actually, that's Third Ward.

Yeah.

[*laughs*] There's no way to cut it in half. In fact, I-45 in the '60s used to be at Polk and Scott. Polk and Scott is right across the street from the Latino Learning Center right there, right down where the light rail is being built. Where 288 is cut off what you consider Third Ward, over to the east… no, not the east, excuse me, to the west. I passed my turn talking to you. I'm just teaching away…

The point I'm making is that the 288 cut off a whole… took about, I dunno, about 20 [to] 30,000 residents out of what used to be Third Ward! Cut *right* through. To the west. So, we done coughed up a highway, and by a purposeful… disinvestment of public infranstructure dollars, particularly when this city had at-large elections, and didn't have single-member districts… our city was cut up. And our money was spent elsewhere. It was spent out in the suburbs, and as the public infrastructure dollars went out, so, too, did the private infrastructure dollars, and so, too did the middle class population. And on and on and on… And I mean, I could give you the history… for instance, Southwest Houston. Look at how, at one point, you looked and you saw how all of the sudden Willowridge, in the early '80s, was a *power*house. How was that? That's because your middle class blacks and whatnot start moving out there. And then, when they built Lawrence Elkins High School—then the blacks started moving from where Willowridge was—Briargate, Ridgegate and all of that, and start moving out towards Elkins, and Elkins—they moved out to Hightower. Those subdivisions out there and on and on… and other stuff, how you see when there was a time when Aldine was like—off the chain. That's because many of the students went out *north*. And those who went out *north*, the further north they went, they went out to those suburbs and then middle schools became powerhouses *there*. Like they are—these Westfields and other ones, the further out you go, you find all of this beautiful black talent out there, just like what integration did to our historically black colleges and universities. Prairie View was the Notre Dame of the South at one time. That arena named after Billy Nicks? That's because you had All-Pros that were coming out of Prairie View, man. You couldn't beat… you couldn't beat Prairie View! This is true! This is true. Then integration came and then they could *go* to those other schools. They didn't want us punishing their talent out there, kickin' they tail.

Even Bear Bryant woke up, sooner or later, and made Alabama—now you look out there, all the great talent … there's brothers out there runnin' that ball, dunkin' that basketball and … doin' all of that. I'm way off track, brother …

That's all right. No, I appreciate it. That's the direction I want to go. Do you think that Third Ward and Fifth Ward and South Park have had similar issues, similar problems, circumstances that have put them where they are now?

Absolutely. The biggest danger we have to our community is not light rail or eminent domain by government. It's *tax foreclosures.* It's moving control of the land. If our mama or auntie or grandmama *owns* some property in South Park, instead of us holding on to it, fixing it up and renting it out, what we do is sometimes is … siblings begin fighting, and because the siblings are fighting, they don't pay the taxes. So we're losing all of our property at *tax foreclosures.* And it's not all because the taxes got too high and we couldn't pay 'em. We just moved away! Our middle class, our black intellectual and intelligentsia, in some cases have moved away. And so now we're seeing a gentrification … I should say a regentrification of certain parts of Third Ward and Fifth Ward. Look at Fourth Ward! Fourth Ward is gone.

Fourth Ward is gone.

Freedmen's Town is gone. Freedmen's Town is just a byword. It's just something we say. But it's gone.

Are the bricks still even there, in the street?

Yeah, in some cases, and then they tear them up if they have a chance.

Yeah they'd take them right out if they had a chance. If somebody gave them a green light, they'd have them out of there tomorrow.

That's a fact. Already know that. If it wasn't for the work of Gladys House, and others there in that area—Lynwood Johnson with the Allen Parkway Village people—that place would've been bulldozed a long time ago …

But see, what has happened is you have had a generation go out to the suburbs, raise their children … it was white flight. It was one of the reasons they created the magnet programs in HISD, but that's another story for another time. But white flight—they went out to suburbs … once they raise their children, put their children through college then they're tired of cutting grass and driving back and forth into the city, so they come back *in* to the city, because we have now the best arenas and stadiums Downtown. Think about it: We've expanded the George R. Brown Convention Center, we have a large convention hotel, we have light rail now, we have one of the greatest museum districts in the world. We have the greatest medical center *in* the world. We have all four of the performing arts: stage, opera, symphony and ballet. What more do you need?

So when a developer comes around and starts plucking away the outer fringes of Fifth Ward, putting condos there, that's fine for some people, "Yeah, I'll take it."

Yeah. See, we don't mind having new neighbors. See, your neighborhood doesn't change. It's your neighbors that do. We don't mind it, but when we change a demographic, sometimes the politics change. Economics change. So, it's something that they had … again, a purposeful public disinvestment, and public … when there's public infrastructure investment, then what happens is that private dollars follow that. Or, private dollars will be invested with the *promise* of public infrastucture investment. Either way, there's a nexus between the two.

So that gets pretty complicated in an area like … South Park doesn't really factor into this much because it's not being regentrified in the same way that you see Fifth Ward and Third Ward, where they're coming in and there's entire neighborhoods that you don't even recognize when you drive through them. But that gets pretty complex when it comes to the allotment of tax dollars to fix up streets that they haven't looked at in 30 years.

That's correct because those streets need *more* work than the other streets. Bringing a neighborhood up to standard, as [former Houston mayor] Bob Lanier called it, which really was his way of fixing up—was fixing up certain neighborhoods, and giving his developer friends a wink and a nod that, "I'm getting ready to fix up this area with public infrastructure dollars. If I were you, I'd make sure I come in there and do some developing." Because now the water lines are going to have the capacity to support multi-family and commercial use, instead of just single family housing. See, the waterline capacity and the larger waste water capacity, the ability to have different kinds of structures other than a single family shotgun house. Or a ranch-style home.

So the infrastructure is important. Without the infrastructure ... look where the public works dollars are going, and you have a good idea of where development's gonna go. A good idea. South Park and Sunnyside ... see, here's where it has happened. The same pattern. It's really not complicated. I wouldn't even use that word. It *appears* to be complicated, but it's not. It's pretty simple. When you look at the Native American, and what was done to him ... they came and they caught, fought or killed all of the braves. And the only thing left was the old ... the old ... the elders, the children and the women. Look at our community! Brothers gettin' locked up like 45 goin' north, and look where they all come from. Look at where the cases of HIV/AIDS are. You don't have to be no conspirator, no conspiracy theory nut. Just *look* at it. And what's *left* in our community: women, grandmothers raising their grandchildren, babies, and elders. That's all. Where are the brothers?

Locked up.

Yeah! So now, what happens is you become a renter, and when you're a renter, you don't have no property or ownership rights, and what happens is they come in ... since there's no zoning, you can build whatever you *want* to on your own property. Unless there's a *deed restriction*, and if there's no deed restriction, brother, you can build whatever you wanna build. So, after a while, these subdivisions—which once were peopled by Caucasians or by middle class *blacks*, before *they* moved out further—now these deed restrictions have *expired*. And so now next to my new ranch-style home, now you look and all of the sudden there's a condominium, a big monstrous condominium built right next to my home. That drives my property taxes up.

And drives you out.

But he was able to build it because my deed restriction expired, which would have precluded him from building such a house. Or such a ... a structure next to me.

How do you think that's going to affect—we talk about those sorts of things, and the regentrification of those neighborhoods, you know, say for example a future possibility of that being an area like South Park ... with issues in the educational system, the health system, vaccines and everything like that in the neighborhoods, how do those things get sort of rearranged? Do you see those things improving?

Only if we wake up. We have to wake up, brother. We have to wake up. Our problem is ... is that we know the truth and we ignore it, so we're paying the price for that. I mean, since I've been a student minister of Houston, Texas, I can honestly say, brother, I've put literally—not I, but we—have put literally a hundred thousand people in front of Minister Farrakhan in this city. It's not like they don't know the truth, brother. Once you hear what I'm telling you, brother Lance, it's not *like* they don't know the truth. But we choose to *ignore* the truth. Anyone's opposition—I'm gonna say from the establishment and from different preachers in this city—to the rise and the influence of Islam in this city ... and I own some things we did. We shot our *own* selves in the foot. But what I want you to know is ... is that when you ignore divine words, brother, it's like ignoring this pain you've got in your chest. "Aight, I'ma go with it. Lemme take two aspirin ... and hell, that's gonna be it." The next thing you know, you got a damn heart attack or a stroke. Why? Because you ignored the warning signs. We were already told this day was coming. When there wouldn't be no jobs for us. We was already told! That the day was coming. That the day was coming, man. Not to take these ... end these vaccines. We were already told that *land* was the basis of freedom, you know? And we need to own some of this Earth we can call our own. We were already *told* all this. So why didn't we heed, when we were told this? By Minister Muhammad, and his servant Minister Farrakhan? Why didn't we heed this? So now, we're suffering. We're reaping what we've sown. And it's not *all* our fault, but at some point in time, you've got to mature enough to be able to say, "We can't be sittin' around here just blamin' *the white man.*" It ain't the man's fault. He gonna do what he gonna do. He did it to the Indians, he'll do it to you and me again and again and again, and of course, if we didn't learn the first time, what the hell's gonna make us learn the second time?

So ministering to them has been a way for you to get that message in there, teach them about health and teach them about what they need to do to ensure their economic base and to build their families up, to retain that land, those sorts of things.

Yes, that's what our ministry's about. We call it our mission. Our mission, brother Lance, is the resurrection of the dead. Now, that's spiritual language for them being the mentally and medically, spiritually, socially, politically and economically *dead.* You know, when you don't do something for yourself and other people do it for you, you're like a dead man. Dead man can't do nothing for himself. When one of our brothers or sisters dies, we go to the funeral home, we wash their body. You're washing, now *we're* washing. His name, the clothes that he's gonna wear at his funeral? He don't dress himself! *We* dress him. We don't *feed*, we don't *clothe, we don't don't shelter ourselves, brother!* We are consumers, and that's useless. So how is anybody going to respect us? You know, Minister Farrakhan points out to us, back in the '40s, A. Philip Randolph threatened FDR with a march on Washington, to bring some people to Washington. And what was he gonna march for? Jobs and justice. Dr. King in 1963, at the great Civil Rights March of 1963, and what did they march for, brother? Jobs and justice. The 20th year anniversary of the March on Washington, 1983—what were they marching for? Jobs and justice. And, at the recent memorial dedication of Dr. Martin Luther King's memorial on October 16 of this year, Reverend Sharpton held a march ... and what did they march for? Jobs and justice! At what point do we get it, brother? Asking him for jobs and justice, when you're supposed to give that to yourself? After a while, people start laughing at you, man. Talking about, "Are you serious? Are you serious? What are you begging me for? Go do something for yourself!" Think about if Barack Obama's jobs bill was passed. It's only gonna create two million jobs. There's 14 million people unemployed! And who do you think ... if white folks create jobs for themselves, who do you think they're gonna give the jobs to? I mean, what's natural? Don't tell me what's *fair.* What's natural? That's what's fair.

We can get our own. Go on and create some jobs for ourselves. Everybody else does. Go over to Bellaire, what do you see? Go on Beltway 8 and Bellaire, over in that area ... Beechnut, Bellaire, Bissonett, and look over there on the Beltway, Sam Houston Tollway ... you see a whole Asian community over there. Go over on Hillcroft, off of 59, and start heading west, and you'll see nothing but Indians and Muslims over there near Harwin and whatnot. You go on the Northside, go on the East End, and you'll see a distinctly Latino flavor. What about the hood? Can you imagine a soul food joint being in a Chinese neighborhood?

But the other way around is perfectly acceptable.

You'll find "you buy we fry." You'll find The Original Timmy Chan's, probably in the black neighborhood!

Two of them.

Come on! That's wild, man. I mean, you got me pumped now.

That's good. That's what I wanted to do. But that's part of the problem, and that's one of the things I was talking to Justice [Allah] about, is when you talk about the health problems in an area like South Park. Drive around—what do you see? The options are so limited, where do you start with that? There's no grocery store where people can go to and buy healthy foods. They can go to the convenience store or they can go to Timmy

Chan's, or Tammy Chin's if it's on the other side of the neighborhood... but where do you start?

Well, you start, brother, with teaching, from my perspective, from *our* perspective, you gotta teach people how to eat to live. If you know better, you'll *do* better. You teach people how to eat to live. You change their diet, then what they'll do is they'll say... you know something? I do believe in economics and the law of supply and demand. If there is no demand, you will look to supply the people with what they're demanding. If we were taught better, or would listen to good teaching, we would demand better food. There's no way we would be eating that garbage. And they would slowly but surely go out of business. And the people who supplied our *better* needs would be the ones that we would go to. You know, it's like that in the street. If a man got some dope that's stepped on, you understand, or got some wacky weed he growing in his backyard, but there's another cat here who's bringing in some red bud Sensimilla, or he got some cocaine that ain't stepped on, so when you smoke it, it goes right straight to your knot? Well word gets down the street! "Man, he has got some *bomb!*" "Nah, here you go—shoot—you need to eat some of *this!*" Well, that cat's the hottest cat in town! They on the same block. You got a dope house on the same block he got a dope house, but everybody come to your dope house. Why? 'Cause you got the best stuff. Supply and demand, brother. If you got the best food, if you teach people—if you give the people what they want, or teach the people what they should want and need, and they will *heed* that teaching, then you'll find, brother, that when you supply their needs, that's how you make money. So I'm not *angry* at the immigrants for coming in the country and making money off of us. I'm not angry at them at all. Because the truth of the matter is, brother, if there's somebody that supplies your needs, then they *deserve* to make some money.

That's on you. It's your needs.

Right. Right. So we gotta learn to supply our *own* needs.

So what do you think the keys in an area like South Park—Third Ward and Fifth Ward are obviously different situations because of where they are and what we talked about with the kind of upcoming gentrification that's happening to the fringes of those [neighborhoods], but as far as providing a strong economic base in an area like South Park, what do you think are the keys?

The keys are to learn the lesson from Third, Fourth Ward, Fifth Ward, and look at what happened to them. Is to have a sense of community once again. To stop wasting our money, and to begin to pool our resources and buy up property in South Park and Sunnyside. Until and unless we do that, all the conversations really are a waste of time. That's the first thing, is to pool our resources and begin to buy up the community where we live. Second thing we've got to do, is that we've got to supply our own needs. Instead of complaining about Timmy Chan's, open up your own restaurant that feeds your people a more healthy style of food, and ask your people, and your people should have enough sense to support you. Be a good businessman. Be a good businessman to them, and let them become good customers so we may circulate our own dollars.

That kind of thing is contagious.

Absolutely. The third thing is is that... make your own neighborhood a decent place to live. Get with your neighbors and clean *up* your neighborhood. Get rid of the junk cars. Cut your grass, fix your fence, paint your house. You know, there's no excuse to live like that. When we can all pool together and clean up, when we can cut down the weeded lots... the city will come help you, but you've got to work the political apparatus so that you can tap into the resources that you already put down for. Whether you rent or you buy, you're still—the taxes the homeowner has to pay at the end of the year get wrapped up in your rent payment. You've already *paid* for the property taxes, even though you're a rental.

You're paying them for the landlord.

Right, so you can just demand of the city that they come out, whether you own or rent, come out and cut these weeded lots and help clean up your neighborhood! Pick up the heavy trash, stop dumping, illegal dumping. This isn't in any particular priority or order, I'm just givin' it to you off the top of my head. And then get involved with the local schools! But don't wait 'til *high* school! Get in the elementary schools and the *middle* schools and straighten these children out *before* they go further, and get caught up in the madness.

Part of the problem is that the City of Houston ignores those neighborhoods until they have a need for them, until they want to start coming in and giving areas to developers.

Well, the day after someone gets elected to represent me is the day I'll be knocking on their door. This is what I need, and if you don't have this done in two years, then don't come back to me for no vote. They only come to us when they want us to vote for them. But what you should demand is for them to help you clean up your own neighborhood. "We gonna have a neighborhood cleanup on this block—will you come out and help us?" And call your city councilwoman or city councilman and say, "We wanna clean up this area, this subdivision. We wanna clean up these lots, clean off this old garbage, pick up this stuff, pick up that." And they can pool together all of the public works and heavy trash pickup, neighborhood protection, to get all that done. They can help you! Every Saturday you can have a community cleanup.

Who is the city councilperson that represents the area of South Park?

I wanna say it's Wanda Adams, because they've redrawn District D, but I'm not really sure because they might—Cohen might cover that. I'm not sure. But I'm thinking—I'm about 80 percent sure that District D is now ... is Wanda Adams, but you'd have to ask City Council ... call down to her office.

Right. I could just see about getting a map of the redistricting lines.

Right. Should be online. Let me get this point across before we do close this interview, brother Lance. In the '90s, Minister Farrakhan came to Houston, and there was a meeting between myself, Quanell X, and J Prince of Rap-A-Lot. And Minister Farrakhan. And he told J Prince, he said, "Brother, one of your rap songs will reach more of our youth than all of my speeches." That's heavy. For a man that has given *thousands* of speeches, has spoken millions of words, has spoken all over this world, all over this *planet*, brother. For him to *say* something like that ... and yet, he *said* it. So, the power of hip-hop has yet to be unleashed to change our condition from bad to good. It *has* been manipulated to change our condition from bad to worse, but now there's a rise of conscious rap. Because all over the world ... as a result of social networks, social media ... but it also is ... over in the Middle East, and it's hip-hop music. You've got the youth of Occupy Houston and Occupy Wall Street. All of them have been affected by the hip-hop generation. Now it's time for them to get down for they crown, brother. And to *rap*, and to put some words of wisdom in their heads about a new world. It's okay to rap about what's going on in your city, about syrup, and "25 lighters on the dresser" and smokin' on hay and the "City Of Syrup," and all of that. All that's fine. But you gotta tell 'em it's *time to rise*. They gotta get ready for the revolution, and they have to seize the *time*. And this is what we are attempting to do by just teaching them the truth, and then letting them put it in the hip-hop music, and then circulate it among the children, so you can then plant seeds of wisdom going forward. There's nothing wrong with rapping about the realities that you face, the poverty and the poor education and all of that, but they need to preach a new world that's fair. That's equitable. That's *just*. That's *free*—what kind of world they would like to see.

Do you feel like those seeds are taking root?

Yes. Because this thing is ... how much lower can we go? We can't go any lower. We can get any more low down than we are right now. We'll just look silly before the world. But we're settin' ourselves up for genocide, for slaughter. Because should the enemy decide to turn on us and slaughter us, nobody would cry out because we're being portrayed as the clowns and buffoons and the degenerative factor throughout the United States! That's being projected around the world. So if they came and mowed us down with tanks and machine guns like the Chinese did their youth in Tiananmen Square, wouldn't nobody say anything. Because we're seen as just being so totally out of the box that somebody needs to put us back and put us in a garbage bag and put us out on the curb. That's the way the world is beginning to look at us. But we've allowed our enemy to do that. We've played into his hands. So what *must* be done is what the Minister showed us in the Million Man March. He showed the world another picture of the black male. Like they had never seen him before. 16 hours—*we* occupied Washington DC for 16 hours! The Supreme Court didn't meet that day, that Monday. The Congress didn't meet that day, and the President was here in Austin giving a speech on race! DC first! And look over there—go right on MSNBC website and look up any of those stories about Egypt. What do they call for Friday? They call for a Million Man March on Friday! Where is the paradigm? Who started that paradigm of *you can't even have a march if you don't call for a million people? It ain't even a march if it ain't a million.* After that, it was the Million Woman March, Million Children March, Millions for Reparations, Million Fat People March, Million ... Million Latino March. Man, please. You can't have a march unless you put "million" in front of it now. We're at the *root* of world revolution, or I'd rather say—in spiritual terms—that global resurrection. The resurrection of the righteous is taking place, all over the planet, regardless of class, creed or color. The dead are rising around the world, and now's the time for our hip-hop artists, for their consciousness to rise. And whether they get played on 97.9 The Box or not, whether they're on the *Billboard* 100 for hip-hop music or not, they need to *seed* the minds of the youth to be ready for the new world yet to come, because the new world is for them. And the enemy of us all would like to take us to hell with him, but our children are the Joshua generation that will lead us into the promised land, and the hip-hop artists are the ones that can put the idea in their head. And when the time comes, that seed will germinate and they will lead us to the promised land.

(2011)

Al-B of Royal Flush

RAPPER · NORTHSIDE

An early figure in Houston, Al-B was part of one of the city's very first rap groups and was there for the Rap Attack contests at the Rhinestone Wrangler.

You met Pimp C early on. When did you last see him?

I had seen him like three months before he passed. He was in Birmingham, and I had come down for the show, and that was my first time seeing him after he'd got home. And dude was like, "We gonna chop it up. Let me go out and do this show." But by that time ... I'm teaching now, so we didn't get to actually chop it up the rest of the night, but we had a long, two-hour talk before he performed that night. And we ain't even talk about nothin' but God, man. We sat up there and just chopped it up about God. Not religion, but just God in general. God and music. And that's all we chopped it up about.

What was his take on it?

On God?

Yeah, was there something on his mind, something that brought it up? Coming out of the pen like that?

Actually, it was like everything. It was like ... it was like basically ... I believe in the Hebrew Israelites, and I believe in the history of black people in the Bible, and he and I were just really just choppin' it up about that. And he was like ... because he never shared his personal religious beliefs on his music. I think only one song that he's every really done that, and people really don't be payin' attention to it, but that's what it was basically about. Me and him was conversatin', and our conversation was the *same*. I guess in his mind, he was like, "Damn, you believe what I believe." His last words to me before "I'll see you later" was, "Man, I always knew me and you was kindred spirits and I always knew we was like brothers, and we was cool and everything." Not like best friends, but we just was ... *respectful* of each other, like to the ultimate. No matter what kind of crowd he was in, this dude always like, "These are the niggas right here that opened the door for me and Bun to step through it." I mean, I don't care what state he was in. If I was around, he always did shit like that. He was like, "I always knew we was kindred spirits, man. But now I know *why*."

When you came back to Houston and joined up with Royal Flush, were the Rap Attack contests still going on at the Rhinestone?

Yeah, they was goin' on, but they was kinda fallin' off by then.

Which was like what year?

That was—like I said, around '86, '87? Cause we'd go to the Rhinestone, but we'd also go to the Northside. We'd got to a bunch of different clubs and we was just like ... the rap battles started becoming ... not passé, but the same people was winnin' all the time. It was either Willie D or *Rick*. Willie D, or the Royal Flush. One time, this dude—you know the dude that's on *Weeds*, Romany? The dude that played ... the dude that grew the weed for the girl ...

On that TV show, Weeds*?*

Yeah. The black dude that grew the weed? He was from Houston, too. He was in a group called The College Boyz. They was on MCA Records. Sometimes, jokers like that would pop in—not a joker, I'm not disrespectin' my man, 'cause my man was talented. I ain't even gonna say that. But they'd pop in and get into the rap battles, right? But the finale was *always* Willie D versus the Royal Flush. Whether it was Willie D versus Class C, or Willie D versus Rick. That's all it was! All the time. At some point, the battles had to kinda ... you know, run they course because the level of competition wasn't there. Like nobody was really consistent. Nobody else was really consistent at that.

Not every rapper can do it.

Yeah, but back then, though, other battlers ... people used to like be talkin' about skill and this, that and the third and how everything flowed, all that? Nah. A Rhinestone Wrangler battle wasn't like that. Rhinestone Wrangler battle was like *Def Comedy Jam* on rap. Russell Simmons packaged *Def Comedy Jam* and you just laugh your ass off all night? That's how the Rhinestone Wrangler battles was. Willie D versus the Royal Flush—who can talk about each other the worst and get the best response from the crowd. It was like ... Rhinestone Wrangler was like *Def Comedy Jam* rappin' *8 Mile*. Like it was packed out like that, like for real—it was packed out like that, right? And these niggas would just be goin' back and forth, bustin' each other ass, like who can drop the funniest shit period. Because the *whole* way you won was strictly on the crowd's response. It wasn't who rapped the nicest, who was the flyest, who hit the most—it wasn't none of that. It was straight up, who can get the crowd to respond? That's how it was. Humor was injected in that. You can hear it in some of Willie's rhymes today!

Oh yeah.

He a funny dude! He talkin' some real shit—he can talk some serious shit, but he a funny dude, you know what I'm sayin'?

Yeah.

And that's what it was. That's what it was like, man.

And that was over on Murworth—that was on the Southside?

Yeah, yeah. Right in the shadow of the Astrodome, man. Right in the shadow of the Astrodome. The Rhinestone Wrangler, right down the street. Walk out the parkin' lot, look to the right, boom! Astrodome right there.

And when you did the battles, was it on a stage or was it on a floor in the middle of people?

On the stage. Like it was just a stage, right? And the crowd—but you know, the Rhinestone always kept reinventing itself, so the stage would *move*. So, for six months the stage might be right here and for six months it might be right there, or every two months they might switch the location of the stage, but wherever it was, whatever location the stage was in the club, when the battle went down, man, I'm tellin' you—everybody in the club, from the restroom attendant, the bartender, the waitresses, every patron was *eyes on that stage*. Every patron. The owner, everybody.

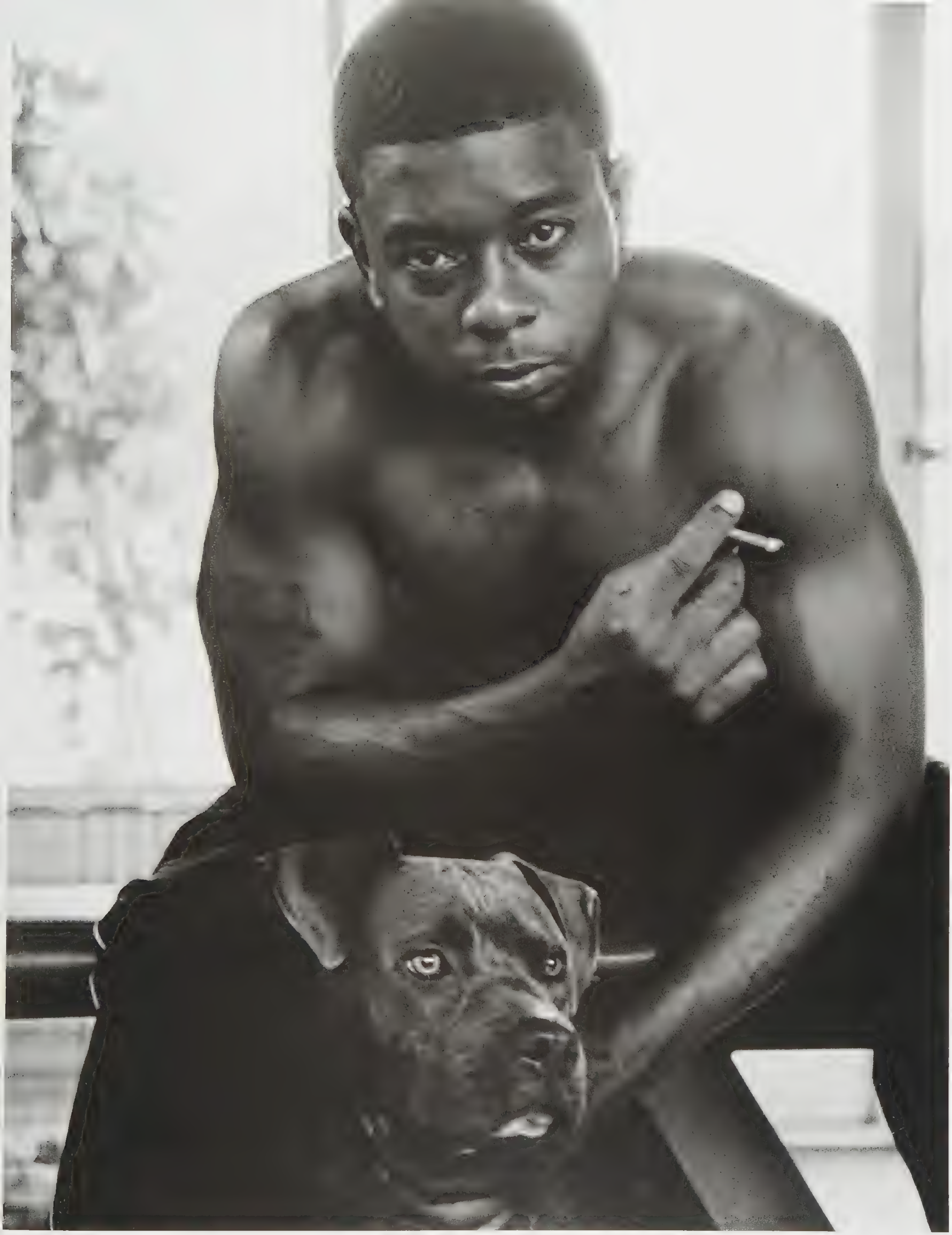
How long would it last?

Man, for fucking *ever*. 'Til whoever couldn't go no more ... or somebody just got a laugh so damn hilarious that R.P. or Steve Fournier just said, "Stop the fuckin' music. That's it. It's over." But it was so dope, though. It was so dope because that kind of *promoted* that club in a lot of ways, man. Because people came *every* week for that battle, to see who was gonna win, who was gonna say what. Like the hardest dudes in the club, man—like the hardest street niggas in the club would be like…it would be just like they would forget they roles for a minute. Forget that they…forgettin' that they had issues. When they was in the Rhinestone, it was like a little vacation for a minute. "All right, now the door's open, we gotta go back out." Man, the Rhinestone Wrangler was a…I ain't ever seen a venue like that *ever*. Like as far as peoplewise, that shit was a fire hazard every night. Every night it was open, like seriously, it was a fire hazard every night.

Like 800 people, something like that, right?

Yeah, fire hazard every night, dude. I'm not playin'. Seriously, it was packed like that. Every night. And then, like I said, when battles start playin' out, then attendance started slippin' and shit started goin' down. And then, you know, J [Prince] musta…I don't know what bugged J, but he wanted to be a record label. And then, you know, we started lookin' at shit a whole lot different then, you know what I'm sayin'?

(2012)



Lil' Flea of Street Military, Southside – 2005.

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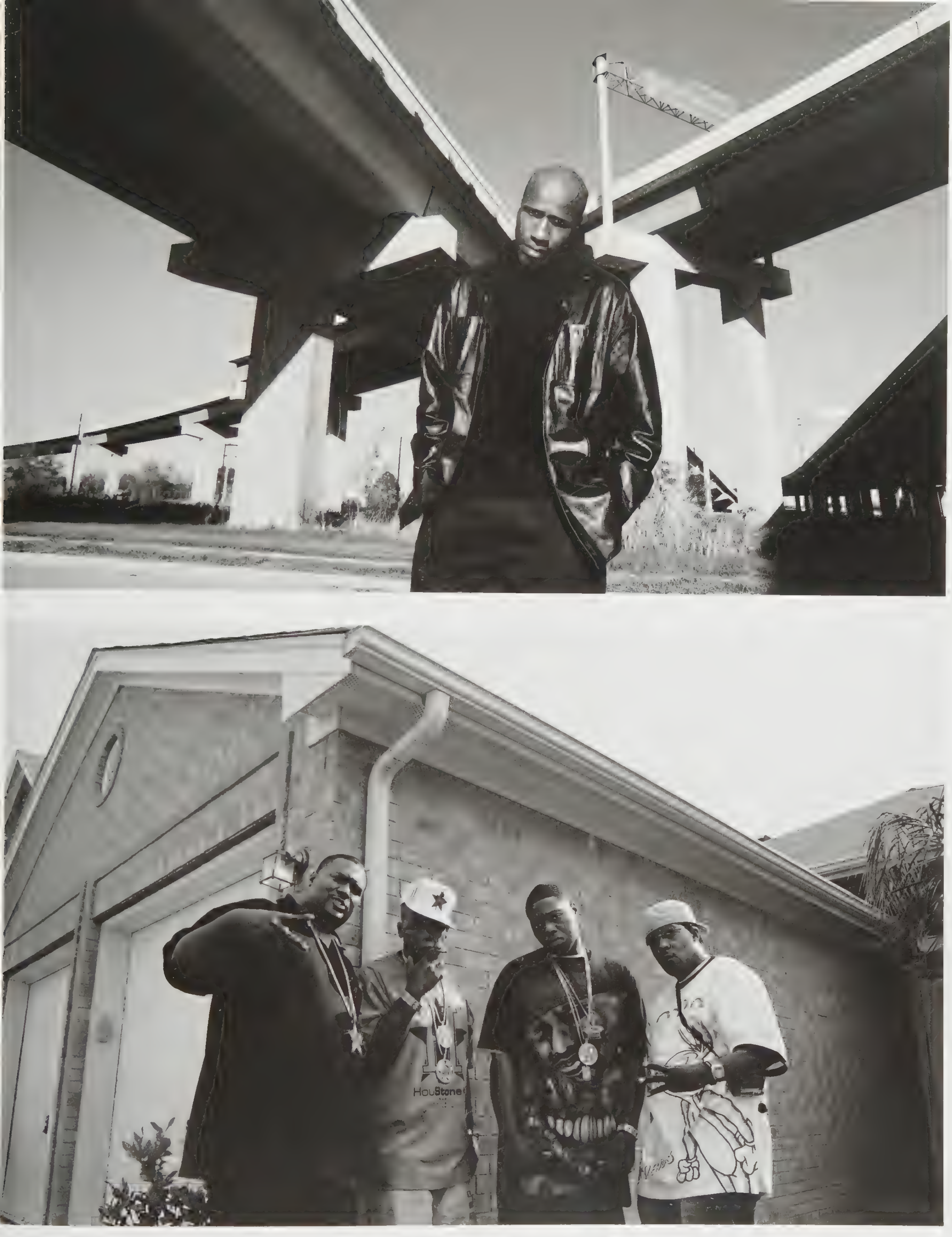
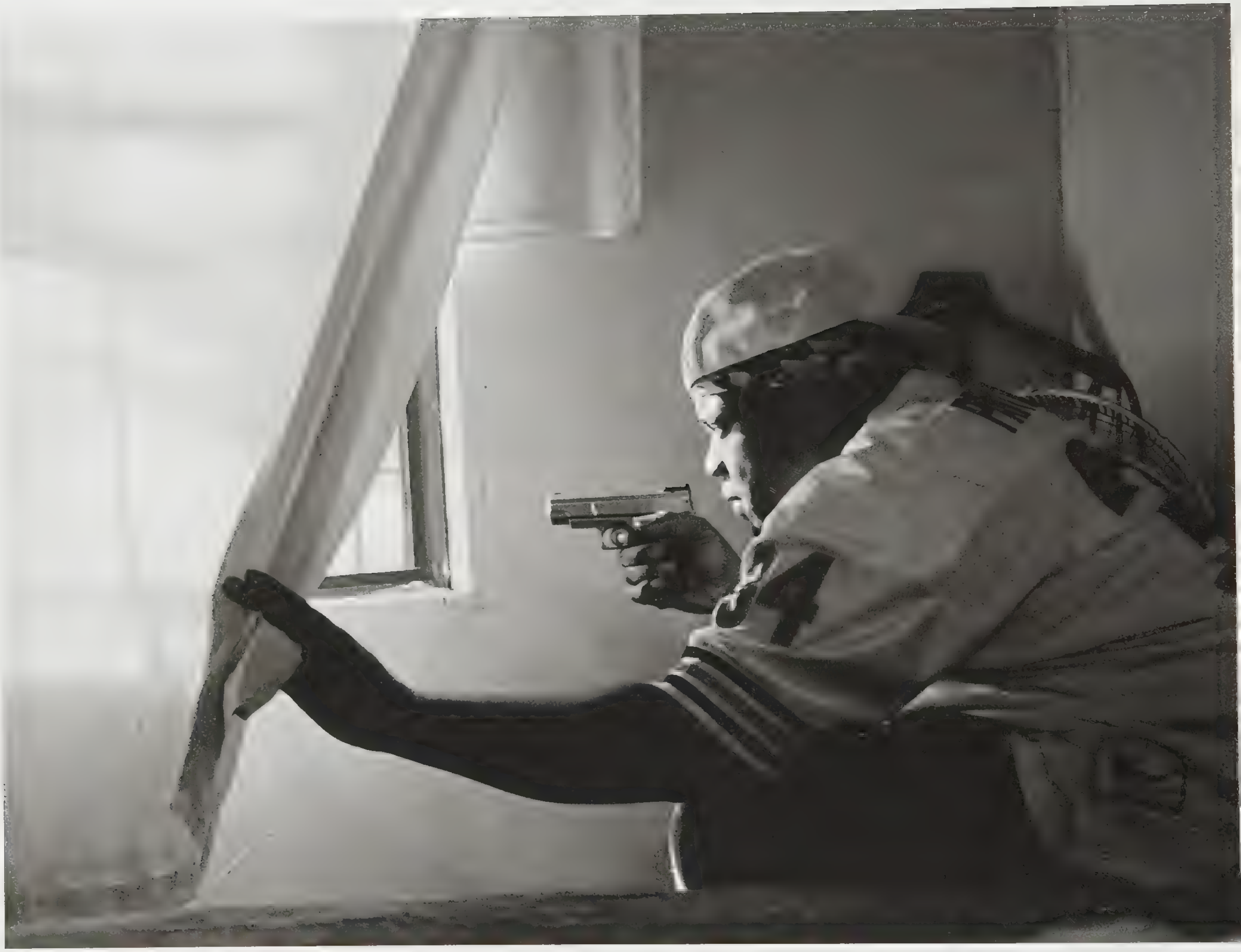
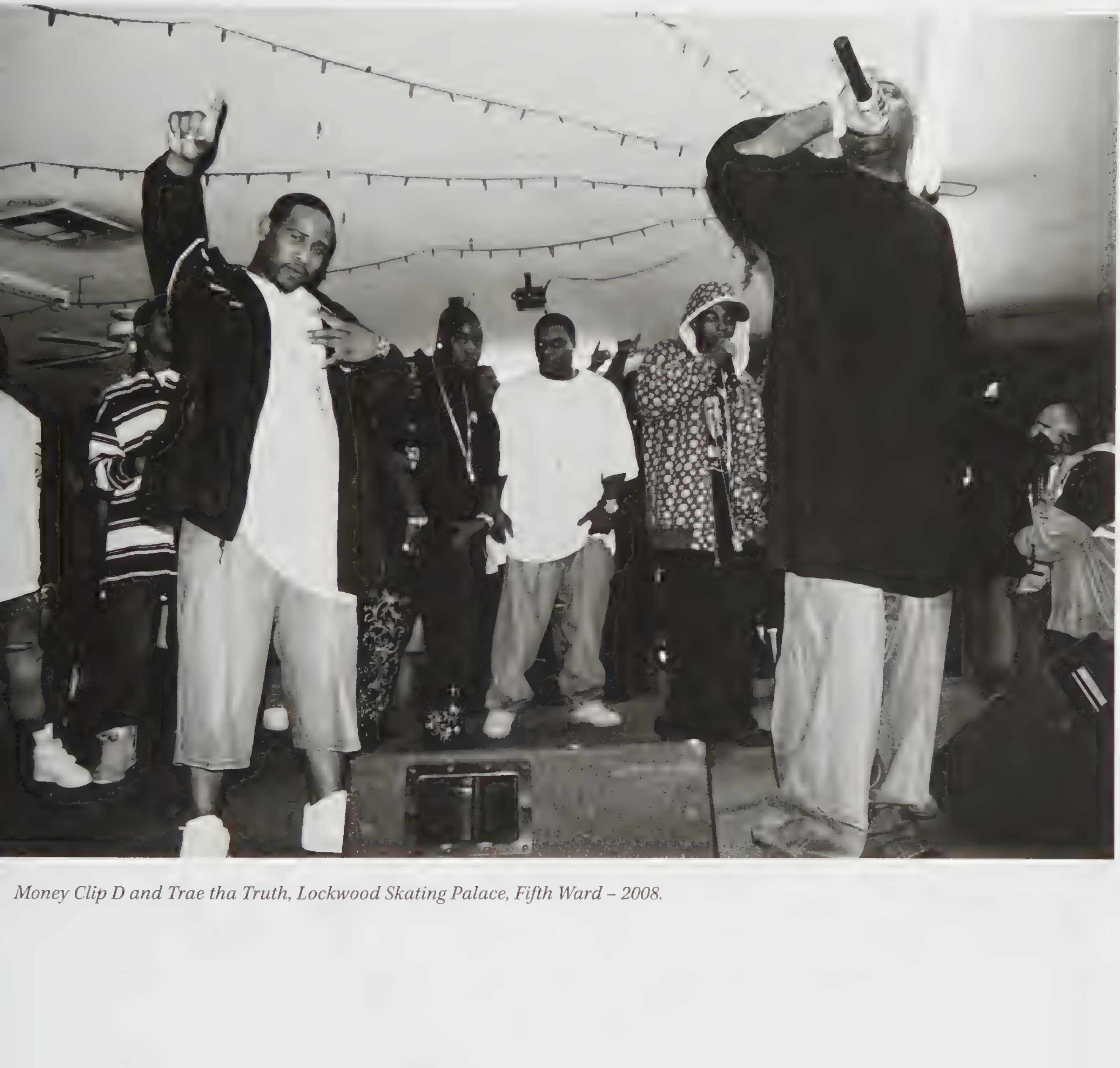
Top: Justice Allah, Second Ward – 2011. Bottom: Ganxsta N-I-P, South Park – 2007.



Top: Willie D, Fifth Ward – 2011. Bottom: E.S.G., DenDen, Z-Ro, Mike-D a.k.a. Bosshog Corleone, Missouri City – 2005.



Kyu Boi, South Park – 2005.

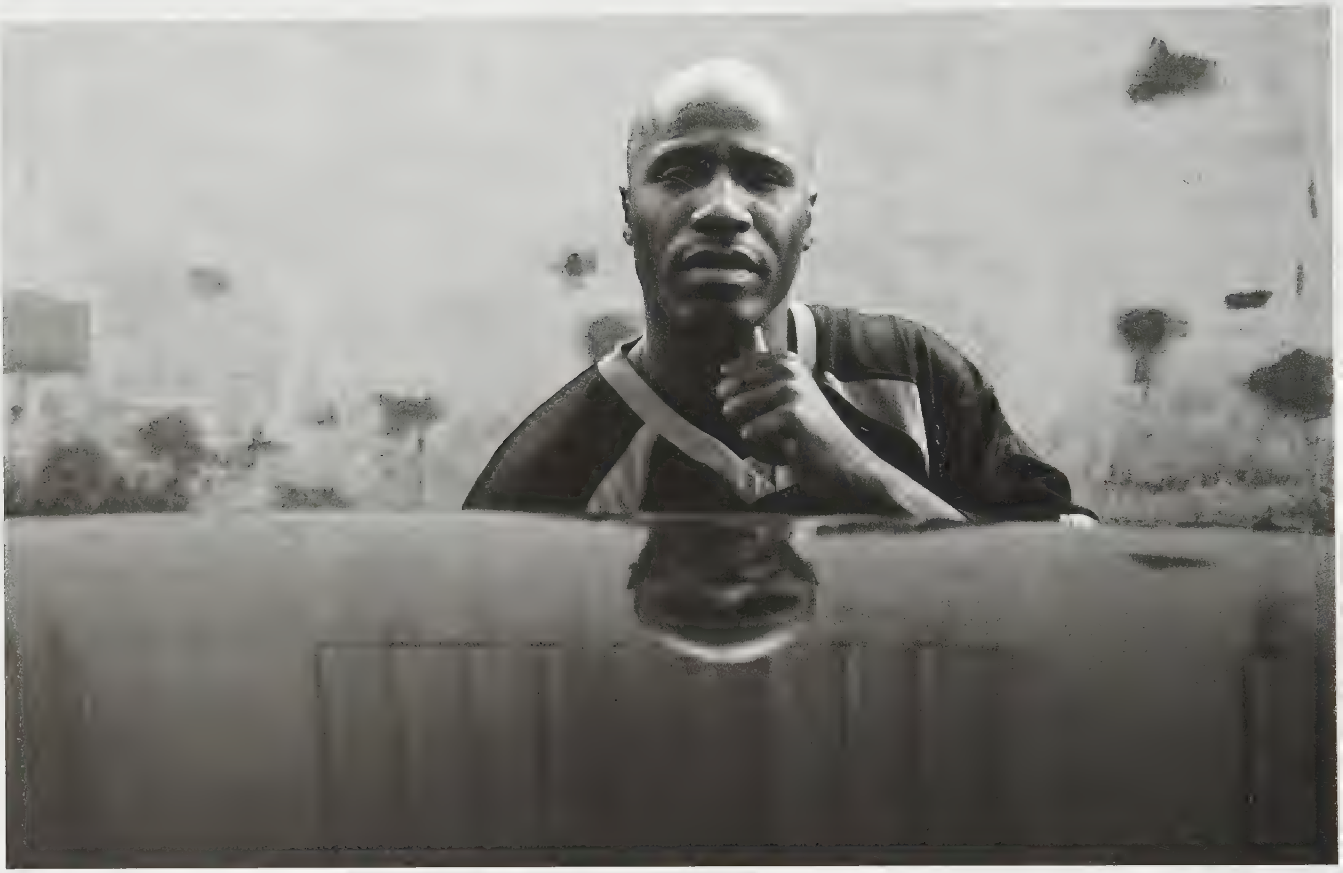


Money Clip D and Trae tha Truth, Lockwood Skating Palace, Fifth Ward – 2008.

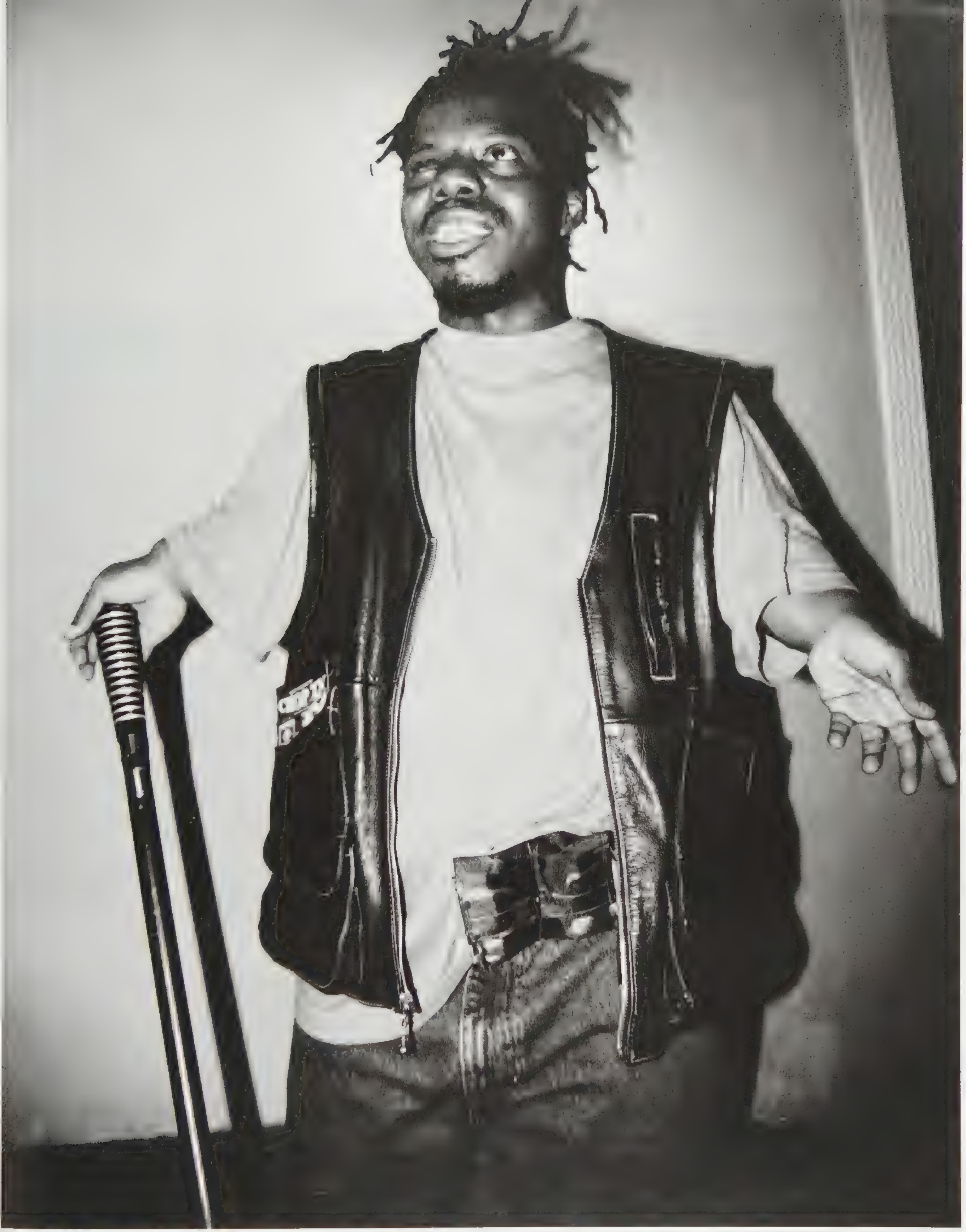
RIP AC Chill

Top: Mike Jones, Northside – 2006. Bottom: K-Rino, South Park – 2007.

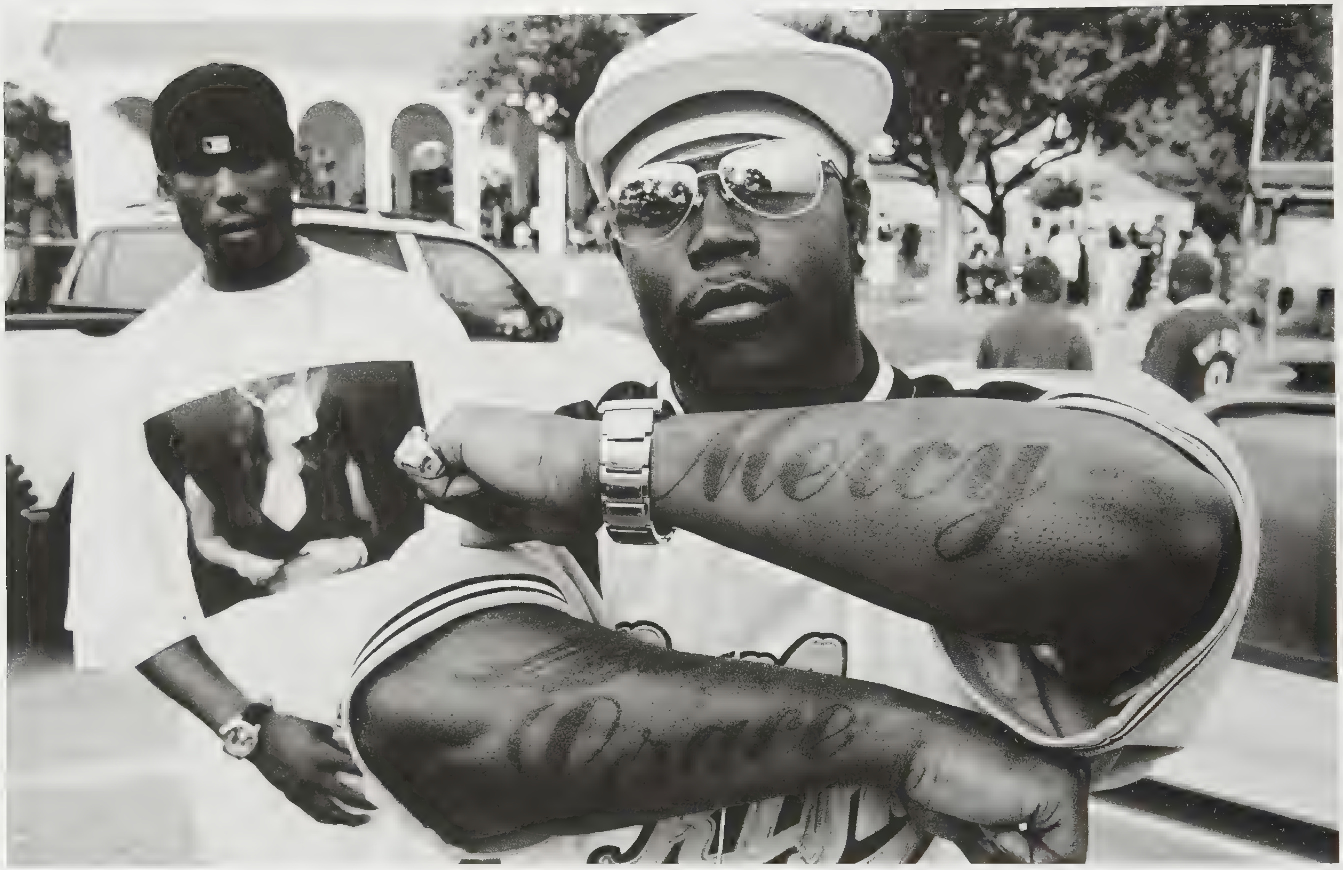
Z-Ro, Missouri City – 2006.



Willie D, Fifth Ward – 2007.



Bushwick Bill of Geto Boys, Montrose – 2005.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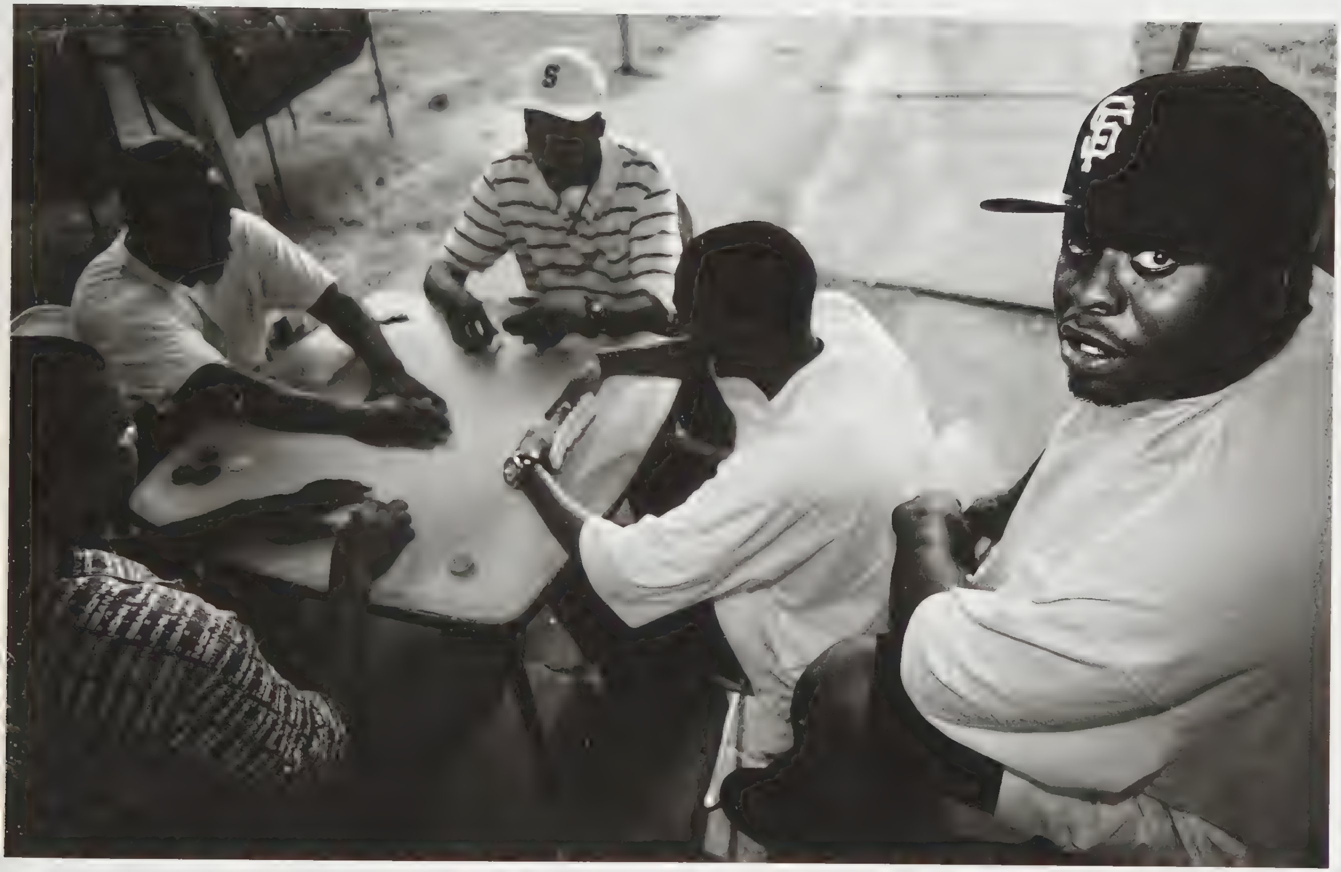
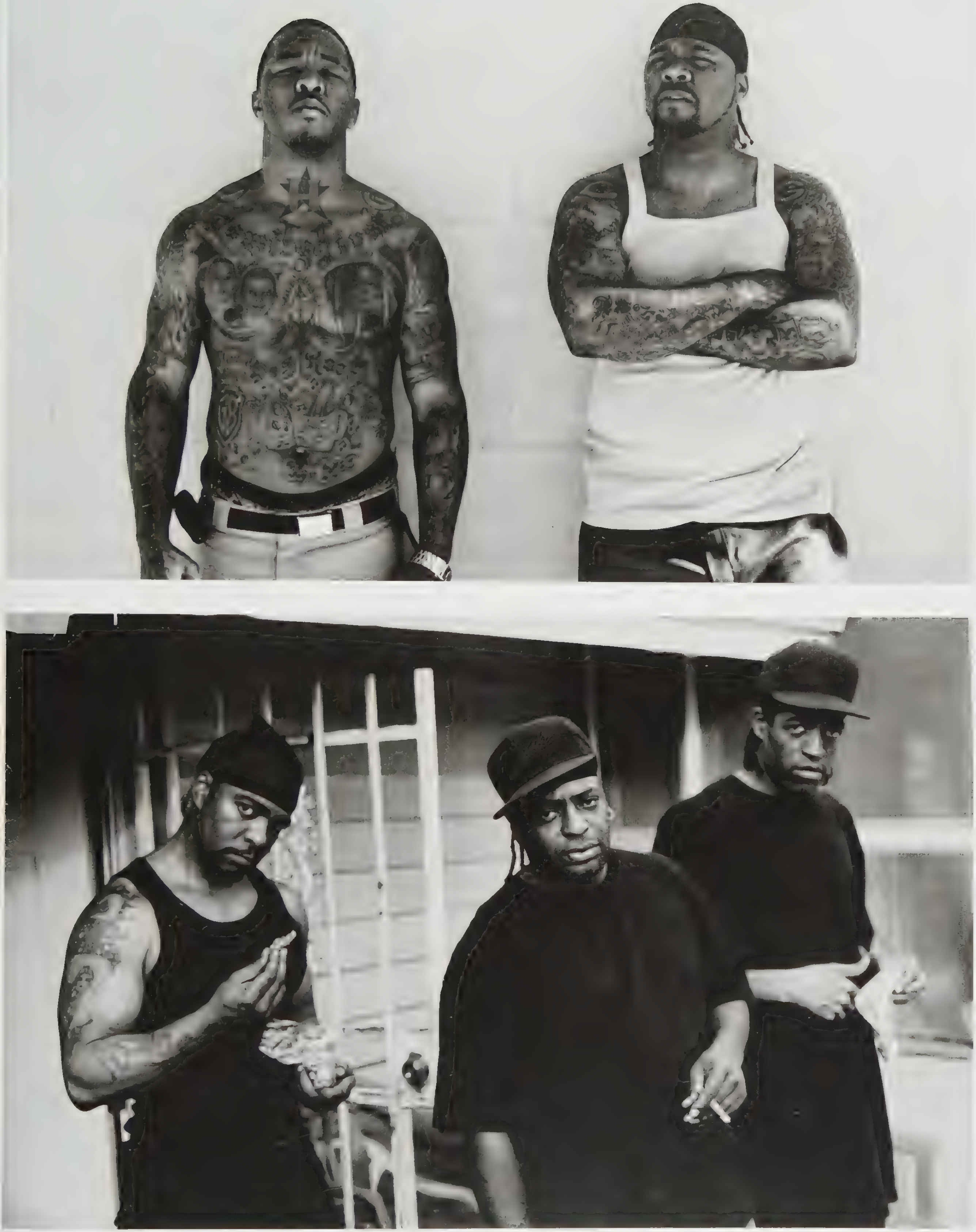
Billy Cook, MacGregor Park – 2006.



Scarface, South Acres – 2007.

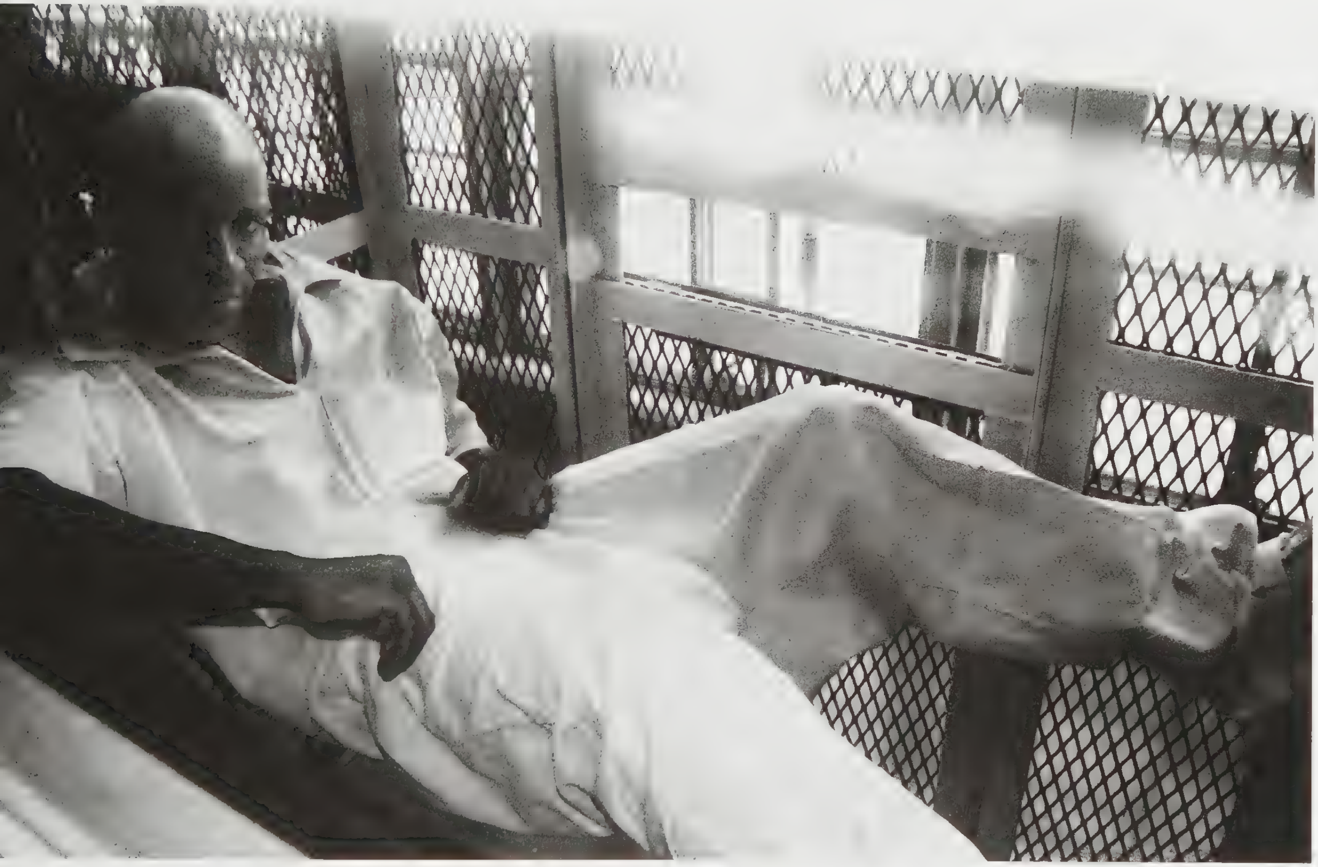
South Park
REAL

Top: DJ DMD, South Park – 2012. Bottom: B.O.S.S. of S.L.A.B., Katy – 2006.

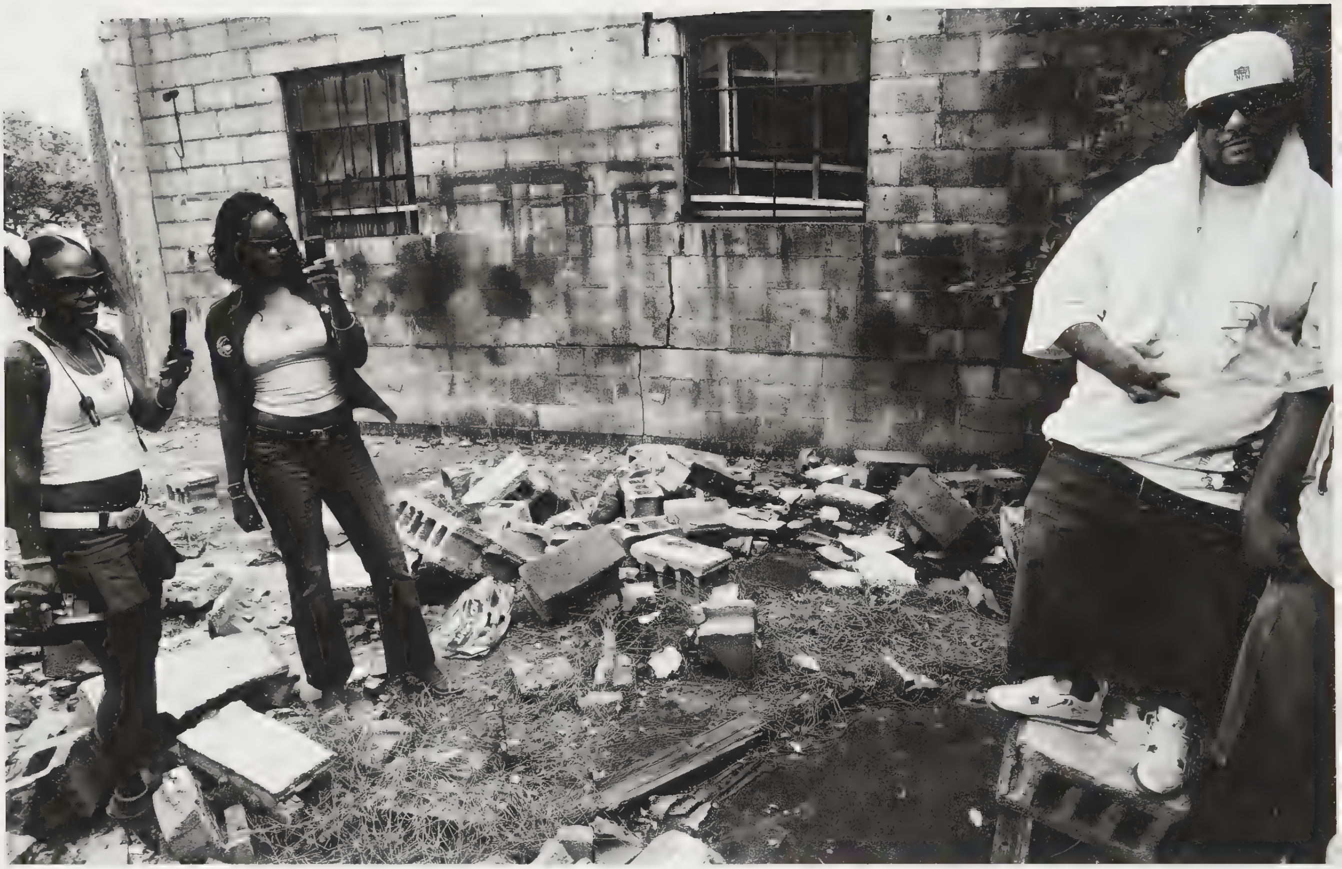


Top: Macc Grace a.k.a. Dat Boy Grace and LOS of Screwed Up Click, Southside – 2009. Bottom: Klondike Kat, J Chill, Dope E. of The Terrorists, South Park – 2006.

Big Mike, South Park – 2005.



Pharoah of Street Military, Coffield Unit, Tennessee Colony, TX – 2005.



Dominiquell Jasmen Turner, Vickie Sekret, Mr. 3-2, South Park – 2006.

Raheem

RAPPER · NORTHSIDE

The first rapper from Houston with a major label record deal, Raheem recorded his debut The Vigilante *for A&M Records in 1988. Several years before that, he had appeared on the first Ghetto Boys single "Car Freak" almost by accident and is credited as an early member of the group. His association with Rap-A-Lot continued after his major label days as J Prince welcomed him back into the fold with the release of* Invincible *in 1992. Raheem was later a member of Blac Monks in the late '90s and has now relocated to the Northeast. "Dance Floor" was his biggest hit back in the day.*

Take me back to the birth of rap music in Houston as everybody remembers it. Were you already rapping in '85, '86?

Yeah. And to be honest with you, I'm glad you said, "Rap music as everybody knows it or remembers it," because rap music started *way* before the Ghetto Boys. Like O.G. Style and those guys, they may have not gotten deals but those guys were involved in Houston rap years before Ghetto Boys formed. As a matter of fact, even though me and E [Prince Ezzy-E, a.k.a. O.G. Style] had our little beef on wax or whatever, I was like one of his biggest fans at one time because Kidz Jamm ... 90.9 [FM] ...

Oh, you're talking about TSU radio. You're talking about the show that came on Saturdays. Wickett Crickett told me about that.

Wickett Crickett, Lester "Sir" Pace, Walter D, Jazzie Redd. I looked up to all of those guys.

That's Fourth Ward right there, too. Jazzie Redd.

Exactly. They kind of paved the way for Houston rap. They showed the artists down in Houston, you know, that it could be done. Because at that time New York was kinda runnin' rap *period*, and they would like freestyle over instrumentals and stuff like that on the air. So for me and any other artist at that time [it was an] opportunity to come to the radio station, play our demo tapes, or just spit something live over the air on TSU radio.

So this was like '85, '86?

Probably about '85, around that time. I definitely tip my hat to those guys for allowing us to build that courage as individuals comin' from down South. Because you know at that time *nobody* coming from down South was recognized as bein' a real *rapper,* you know what I mean? But they were that outlet.

Don't you think that was kind of the fuel for a lot of you guys, that rap was really owned by the East Coast, even though you had artists like the Wreckin' Cru out west, but the idea that rap wasn't supposed to come from anywhere else, and people were ignoring the South, didn't that give you guys that independent spirit?

It helped. It definitely helped. But at the same time you gotta realize that rap wasn't really bein' respected as an art form *period.* East or West Coast. So we just wanted to get our foot in the door and just say that we were rappers. We weren't really trippin' on the fact that we were from the South or they were from New York. It was just about—we were good rappers, we were good writers, and we wanted to be in the circle with ... with Rakim, you know, whoever was coming out and was hot at that time. It didn't matter where they were coming from. We just felt that we could compete and rap ... you know, that's what it was. It was kind of like a lyrical contest *sport.* You had to battle. And so, that's kind of what brought most of those older artists into the game. You know, the newer guys ... as the business kicked in it started turnin' into flash and money and things of that nature, but originally it was just about letting on and letting it be known that we were a force to be reckoned with, too. In terms of our lyrical content. We weren't trippin' on where cats were from or nothin' like that.

K-Rino told me a story about a battle that you and he tried to have that never happened. Maybe you came to his school and he got pulled back into school ... I guess this would have been '86. Around the time Real Chill was starting. Do you remember that?

I do [*laughs*]. But he ... he *killed* Jukebox, though. I remember that. He tore Jukebox up.

That's exactly what he said. That he didn't get to battle you but he tore Jukebox up in the parking lot of a skating rink.

Man, he *ruint* Jukebox, ain't no ifs, ands, or buts about that. But you know, K-Rino ... got a lot of respect for that brother. I never really got an opportunity to hear him get down until, you know, real late. Because, you know, I left Houston and you know, I had a lot goin' on when I was down there. The last five years that I was there I was real busy.

You put out a couple of records in that time, too, didn't you?

Hell yeah. Actually I did something with the Blac Monks in '98.

3-2.

Yeah. Well, 3-2, AWOL, Storm. So I had that poppin' off. And other things. I was going through some situations with Rap-A-Lot. I was actually tryin' to get another solo project out but ... I did some things with Scarface that he never released ... there was a lot goin' on.

Tracing back to the beginning, when you were talking about Kidz Jamm and that era. Was Royal Flush formed at that time? Triple Threat, Def IV, those groups?

Yes, yes.

So were they formed before Ghetto Boys?

Yes, all those groups were formed before Ghetto Boys. Royal Flush ... they was like the kings of the Rhinestone Wrangler. The original Rhinestone Wrangler. They were like club rappers and they had Rhinestone Wrangler sewed up. You couldn't come through there and really try to win no contest if the Flush was in there because the Flush, they were like the reigning kings.

Romeo Poet was there around that time.

Class C, all them cats.

So you would go in and battle at the Rhinestone, too?

I was too young. I was 15-years-old. I used to have problems gettin' in. But when I met NC Trahan, well, you know ... Lil' James and all those dudes—they used to get us in. And you know they would kinda like hide us because we weren't supposed to be in there in the first place. So we never really got on the mic and did anything in terms of battling the Flush. Or Willie D, or *any* of those guys that got up on the mic, because they were old enough to be there.

When J was courting you guys to form a group, you and Jukebox and Thelton [K-9] ... you guys were still in high school, right?

Me and Jukebox were still in high school. Thelton had graduated. Thelton was already out of school. But in actuality, I was never really supposed to be a Ghetto Boy. The reason I became a Ghetto Boy was because

Jukebox didn't show up for a recording session on "Car Freak." And the part that he was sayin', I had written because we used to write everything together. So [J Prince] just said, "Yo, 'Heem, go in there and spit 'Box's part." So I said, "Aight," and I went in there and I spit his part on "Car Freak." And because my voice was on the record, I took the picture and that's how I became a Ghetto Boy. *Making Trouble* was written after "Car Freak," that whole album … everything you hear Johnny C sayin' … not to take anything away from Johnny C's creativeness, because Johnny C is amazing to me. I mean my man got *down*. But everything you hear him sayin' on the *Making Trouble* album, I wrote. Basically I told J, I said, "Look, it's time for me to go solo. I wanna do my own thing." Because I came to him as a solo artist. I never intended to be a Ghetto Boy. And he said he understood, and Ready Red said he had a homeboy in New Jersey that was willin' to come down and get down. So when Johnny C came we basically just filled in for the parts that I wrote. I really wasn't … I wasn't really … I was *cool* with the Ghetto Boys but I wanted to do my own thing and the Ghetto Boy thing was J's creation, you know what I mean?

So you and Johnny C were never in Ghetto Boys at the same time, then.

Nah, nah.

Not even on Making Trouble*?*

Nah, I wasn't on *Making Trouble*. I wrote Johnny C's parts on *Making Trouble*, but I never recorded anything. And see, that in itself kind of had vibed me because I felt as if, you know, "Why not let him come in and do his own thing as opposed to havin' him rap what I wrote." And we did have a *small* confrontation about that because he was kinda thrown into a position where he had to do something and me, I was kinda young and arrogant at the time, and I started … I mean, we had a brief battle. It wasn't nothin' major to get blown out of proportion or nothing. But once again it was competition, and I felt as if, you know, if you want to compete, compete with what *you* do. Don't try to compete with what I do.

So you left the Ghetto Boys to do what you were doing originally, to become a solo artist. So this like '87, somewhere in there?

Yeah, *Making Trouble* came out about a year, year and a half after "Car Freak."

So you were out starting to do solo shows then. At what point did A&M start courting you?

Okay … now I don't wanna step on J's little story, you know, but according to J, *he* put that together. That's not the way that went. He wanted them to do the *Making Trouble* album, and A&M said that they didn't want it. And Cliff Blodgett had *my* album in the stash, and he said, "Well if you don't want this, check *this* out." And they played my album and A&M said, "Okay, well we'll work with him." And that's the way that went. That was not the genius of Lil' J. Not to take anything away from him, because he had a plan, he stuck with it, he made it happen. I got all the respect in the world for the man, but that's just not the way that particular situation went down.

So Blodgett produced your album, too?

No … Karl Stephenson.

But Blodgett produced the demo that got you signed?

No, no, no. Karl Stephenson produced it from the get. Basically what Cliff did was just present it to A&M Records when they said that they weren't ready for *Making Trouble*. And keep in mind that I'm not saying that *Making Trouble* wasn't good or that it wasn't put together well. It was just simply … they weren't ready for that gangsta stuff yet.

That's the interesting point about what you were doing versus the direction you went. The stuff you were doing was much more akin to the national audience at that point.

Well it was comin' from the mindset of a 15-year-old. It was straight hip-hop. It strayed more so toward some of the things that were happenin' then *in* music and the Ghetto Boy thing was a bit different. It was new. N.W.A. hadn't come out yet so gangsta rap *really* hadn't been discovered and A&M wasn't ready for that. A&M wasn't ready for *me!* They had me on tour with Jeffrey Osborne and Lester Williams! What's wrong with this picture here? I can't get up there and sing "Whoo Whoo Whoo," and have them old ladies throwin' they panties up on the stage. But you know, that's all they had to work with. At the time it was R&B singers that they had on the label and I just had to get in where I fit in and it didn't work. Straight up, it didn't work. But I appreciate the opportunity to be with A&M, and I definitely appreciate the fact that Cliff Blodgett thought highly enough of what I did at that time to even present that to 'em. Because I didn't even know he had a copy of it, to be honest with you, but he looked out for me. But they weren't ready for it. It didn't work. After I did that, I kinda went ... you could say underground for a while ... because I was still dealin' with a lot of teenage issues. You see a lot of people didn't realize ... a lot of people thought I was 21, 22 at the time. You know, I'm 15, 16-years-old. I'm meetin' my first girlfriend. I'm doing a lot of things teenagers do at that age. So I kinda went underground for a little while.

That was young.

Yeah, exactly. I'm a kid, pretty much. But I came back to J, I said, "Look, man, I got another album. What can you do for me?" And he said well, "Yo, lemme hear what you got." And so I presented the *Invincible* album and he was like, "Yeah! This is hot! I could feel this." And he put it out, and when he put it out, it did what it did, and to this day I don't *know* what it did.

Backing up for a second ... you being on the national stage, you were the first visible Houston artist, and you have to say it that way because you were the first major label artist. How were you treated in that national spotlight as the first Houston artist?

I was hated by the rappers and I was loved by the chicks and that's pretty much it. Accordin' to J, though, I hadn't arrived. I hadn't really broken any ground. And that was his quest for more. One thing about J—you could never do enough. You just had to constantly be doin' more. Which was good, to a certain extent. At that time, I don't think I was focused on the things he was focused on.

Here's the other side of that question: how were you seen in Houston, being its first export?

Hmmm ... well at that time, like I said, rap still hadn't reached its peak yet and so I didn't get any preferential treatment or anything like that, if that's what you're askin'. But the rappers hated me. Everybody from the Flush to the Ghetto Boys hated me.

So that was the case locally.

Yeah that was the case locally. On the national scale I couldn't really tell you what the take on me was at that particular time because I was ... I was in the wrong arena, you know? I was on tour with Shanice Wilson and stuff like that. I wasn't around a rap audience.

That says a lot for J, then, to take you back after all of that. For him to say, "I still see something in this artist," especially seeing as you were hated by the rappers he even had on his own label.

Definitely, definitely. And for that, I got a lot of appreciation for him giving me that opportunity to do one more album because my creative process was still growing to a certain extent. When I did the "Dance Floor," album, I was still learnin' in terms of my writin' skills, in terms of the type of tracks that I felt like I needed ... there was a lot that I was still goin' through. And I had an opportunity to show a little more on the *Invincible* album, but even after the *Invincible* album, I had more to *give*. But me and J, we just couldn't ... for some reason we couldn't make it happen for a third time.

In between The Vigilante *and* The Invincible, *a lot changed in Houston. The tone changed to something a lot darker.*

It did.

Was that reflective of Houston, or something else?

I think, and this is just my take on it—I just feel as if music at that point ... everybody was tryin' to outdo everybody. If you ... if you're plannin' on killin' a person this way, well I got to kill 'em a little worse than *you* kill him, know what I mean? It had gotten a bit ridiculous to me, to be honest with you. It was like, "Come on, man…" Especially if I *know* you, and I know this really ain't your personality. A perfect example, though he my man… Ganxsta N-I-P. I think Ganxsta N-I-P was a bit over the top, you know what I'm sayin'?

What did you think… and this is kind of one generation to the next… but because you came up earlier than them in a way, but you remember Darryl Scott from back in the day and the techniques he was developing. Once those techniques were put to use by DJ Screw…

I'm glad you mention Darryl Scott because Darryl Scott and I got a real deep history. Darryl Scott was one of the first individuals that ever made a beat for me so that I *could* take it up to Kidz Jamm. Me and a couple other cats back in the day used to go to Blast Records all the time. We used to skip school and go over there. Darryl would let us hang out, buy us pizza, feed us, let us get down on his equipment and everything. So that's my man right there. I'm sorry I left him out.

That's my job.

[*laughs*] Darryl Scott played a big part in keeping us motivated, keeping us focused, keeping us out of trouble. He gave us that safe haven to perfect our craft.

He was somebody you really looked up to at the time.

Absolutely. Not only that, he was ownin' his own record store, know what I'm sayin'? A black man ownin' his own business back then? You the *man,* dog! Plus he used to get all the fly chicks. Oh *man…* Darryl's shop was *good.*

Was he producing for people back then, too?

He had a little drum machine and all it took was a beat and some scratch and he gave us that. Word up. My first time goin' in actually E had a demo… I can't think of the name of the damn song…

When you say "E" who are you talking about?

Oh… O.G. Style. His original name was "Prince Ezzy-E." So I called him "E." But O.G. Style, he had a demo tape that they used to play on TSU every week, and they only played… the voice was on one side, and the beat was on the other side. So with Darryl I was like, "Man, I gotta get with E this time, I gotta get with E this week." And he was like, "Well come on in the back." And he hooked me up a stereo beat, man, I walked it up Jazzie Redd and them, and they put me on, man, right then and there. And there was a lot of cats, man. There was this chick, man, called Queen Supreme, Lady C… man, just endless amounts of people that were gettin' down back then, that you know, faded into obscurity or just left it alone, you know… early.

I think if there would have been an industry in place in Houston at that point then they would have stuck around.

I agree. I agree.

J created that.

Yeah, he did! Absolutely. He the Godfather, man. Can't take nothing from him. He believed in his own dream. Also, he believed in all the time and effort me and Jukebox put into comin' over there rappin' for him, rappin' every opportunity we got, writin', perfectin' our stuff, havin' it memorized, bein' able to drop it on point. You know, he saw something in that. He saw something in that and he said, "You know, I'm gonna give you cats a chance." And he did. He was one of the few dudes that kept his word. He said, "I'm gonna create this label, I'm gonna put you guys on wax, we gonna name the label Rap-A-Lot, after Sir Rap-A-Lot."

Thelton's name.

Well, we discussed it. We discussed it.

Thelton's his brother, right?

Yeah, yeah. That's his brother. Yeah, we sat down at the round table and we discussed it. That was one of the few times that J actually treated us like men as opposed to, you know, little school kids. "What you think we should call the record label? What you think we should call the group?" I said, "Hip-hop Vigilantes." Whenever you talk to him, ask him about that. He was like, "Hell nah!" He was like

"Hell nah—Hip-hop Vigilantes?" I was like, "Yeah. Ghetto Boys?" You had the Beastie Boys, the Boogie Boys… "Man, ain't nothin' fly about that." And he was like, "Nah, Ghetto Boys, we gonna roll with that." I was like, "Aight." Here go his check. It's a wrap. But at the same time, I knew that I wanted to do my own thing, and he knew it too. When we recorded "Car Freak," I recorded my solo single—it was a song called "It's My Record," that same particular day. It never came out. I guess J wasn't feelin' it at the time. But still, he paid that money, let me go in there and do my thing. I definitely got a lot of respect for J, man. J… he that individual that put me on. If it wasn't for J, wouldn't be no Raheem, no Geto Boys. J the man. No doubt.

Who do you still keep up with from back in the day? I know you talk to Ready Red…

I talk to Red. I talk to Bushwick. I really don't talk to anybody on a regular basis to be honest with you because all this distance. People down there doin' they thing. I talk to Willie D briefly probably about six months ago. I haven't talked to Face. Whenever I come across someone that may know them or what have you they'll turn them on to my number or vice versa and you know what I mean you *conversate* and we talk about old times and what have you… and you know, I wish 'em luck. To keep on doin' what they doin', whatever it is they doin'. It's all love. It's definitely love. You know, my thing is you know, I ain't got no hate for Houston or no dislike for Houston. My time was just up.

Willie's always good for a phone call, too. He's good people.

Yeah, man. He one of the few people that still quote lines from "Dance Floor." I'm like, "Man, come on, you don't get off to that old stuff, man…" "I turn on the radio…" I'm like, "*Look* at this man…" But yeah, Willie D good people, man.

Thing about him is that, same as you, he lays off of everything. He's got all those memories.

Okay, well, you know, Willie D, he can definitely give you a little more insight in terms of the successful side of Houston and rap scene. Because when I was doin' it there just wasn't no money involved, you know what I mean? It was just all work, and never really nothing we saw back off of it. For what reason, I don't know, you know, maybe money wasn't comin' in like that. Keep in mind, we did "Car Freak" and never even had a contract, so they was goin' through a learnin' process also. I definitely wasn't up on my business, 'cause you know, I'm like 15, 16… give me a couple dollars and Pontiac Slimbird, let me go to the club, get in free and I'm *good*. You know, back *then* [*laughs*].

A couple of free Sprites at the bar and I'm good.

Man, I'm straight. I'm cool. Shit. So I mean I moved on and I started seein', "Man, this band could be lucrative, for real, for real." And J started sayin' he was gonna do it, he doin' it, he got the homeboys out there, they got that platinum plaque and of course I started waterin' at the mouth, I'm like… "Shit, what's good? Lemme do something!" He put me back down, but uh… J kinda wanted my stuff to sell *itself*, you know, he didn't really wanna have to put a whole lot effort into it. You know that's kinda what happenend with *The Invincible*, not to mention that him and Cliff were goin' through a situation at that time that I kinda… or my *album* kinda got caught up in. It was probably just pretty much bad timing. Because anybody will tell you that that particular album, they still don't understand why that album didn't go. I still don't understand why it didn't go. But you know, I ain't got no hard feelings. It is what it is. Whatever happened… you know what I'm sayin'? I moved on. He moved on. You know, it's all good.

As long as you made a good record, that's all that counts.

Exactly. I mean I did what I set out to do, and that was to let everybody know that at that time I was the reigning king, whether it be a battle, whether it be storytelling or whatever. On the mic, [you] couldn't touch me at that time. But now, I'm gonna let these young boys have it [*laughs*]. I kinda been layin' back, know what I mean. I mean I still do stuff but you know, I'm not as intense as I was back when I was younger.

Time and a place for everyone.

Exactly, and you know, because of that I can accept and respect other forms of music. And if it's garbage, I'm gonna let you know it's garbage. And there's a lot of garbage comin' out. There's a lot of garbage everywhere now, because I'm on the East and I'm checkin' some of these cats out and I'm like *nah.*

In closing, tell me a story about Big Mike.

Just to give you some dialogue on my man Big Mike, man, I got outta jail one time and me and Dr. Dre was at a club … what was that club … Club Riddims! And these niggas was … excuse my French … these niggas was gonna jump me or some shit, you know what I'm sayin'. They wanted to rumble with G and I know G from back in the day. He was ridin' with Dre that night. And the police, they grab *me*, 'cause you know, they don't know who the hell I am. They know Dre, they know G Riddim or what have you. The police, they grab me and shit, man … Mike grabbed the *cop* and said, "Man, where the hell you goin' with him? Man, nigga that's Raheem!" That's Mike. That's that Mike mentality, man. That's my boy right there for life. He just always kept it real with his boys. He's one of the only cats that I can honestly say … success and all that, none of that changed him. That's Mike. That's *it.* That's a real brother right there, and I hate that things didn't go well on that *Til Death Do Us Part* album. But if you talk to Mike, tell him I ain't forgot. This nigga grabbed a *cop* and told him, "Yeah, where you goin' with him? Don't put the cuffs on … don't put the cuffs on him, that's Raheem."

What did the cop do?

They let me go! Straight up! Hell yeah. Motherfuckers let me go. I will never forget that shit. I was like *damn.* But I was really fired up then. I really wanted to go to blows with G's motherfuckin' ass that night. I'm like, "Damn, motherfucker you from Houston, too. Shit … the fuck is you ridin' with that L.A. nigga for?" But you know … I was beefin' over some crazy shit. Some shit I shouldn't have been beefin' over.

Tell me about the first time you met Bushwick.

Bill, he was aight.

What's an early story you remember about him?

When Bushwick Bill jumped up close to four feet off the ground and smacked the shit out this dude in my girlfriend's apartment. Shit … I don't really know what the hell happened. Ain't nothin' really *gotta* happen for Bill to jump on you and shit. Bill crazy as hell. But J had just inducted him into the Ghetto Boys and he was stayin' with me … well, he wasn't really stayin' with me, just stayin' overnight. But my man Shakim was like, "Yo, Bill about to fight this motherfucker out in the park." So I went outside, man and I saw Bill jump up off the ground and smack the shit out this motherfucker. I was like, "Damn! This motherfucker got heart." Not to mention he was cuttin' motherfuckers all in the club and shit.

When he was a dancer?

Well, J wanted him to be a dancer at first, but he jumped off of that real quick. He didn't wanna be a gimmick, so they started … said, "Aight, we'll have somebody write something for you, and you'll be in the group, you'll be a rapper."

Willie D wrote his first raps, yeah?

I believe so. Bushwick Bill. That's my man right there. He's something else. You can't live with him and you can't live without him.

(2008)

Big DeMo

RAPPER · SOUTH PARK'S LONG DRIVE

Best known as the inspiration for DJ Screw's legendary June 27th *mixtape (1996), as it was his birthday tape.*

What do you do for work right now?

Well I work for a company that do final clean. It's just like if they're building a building, we make it ready before the customer move in.

Like after construction and everything.

Yeah, yeah.

All over Houston?

Yeah, all over. Sometimes we go to Austin and surrounding areas, Galveston, all over, really Texas, but we do most of our work in Houston and about 20 percent in Austin.

Do you know a lot of artists that have picked up extra work like that? Started picking up day jobs and things like that to feed their families?

Well, I know DJ Red, I know he actively works, and lemme see ... I think Lil' D ... well, he go by D-Gotti now, I don't know what he doin' but I know he was actively working, you know. There's a few of us. A lot of us too proud to speak about it, but you know me, I'm from the "don't work, don't eat," you know ... only a fool would be scared to go out and get a job. You can't be a fool.

With the recession, times are really tough, and people have got to, one way or another, you know?

Yeah, that's the way I am. I try to ... especially now, I'm at the age where we stay legal if we can, so we try to stay free. That's just what I do, man. It's just stuff you gotta take as a man or a human being. It has nothing to do with who you are. It's who you are deep within. If you not scared to survive, you ain't scared to do nothin' to keep surviving.

You just released ... I just saw a little thing about the Screw tape that you had that was kind of archived—the E.S.G. tape?

Yeah! The E.S.G. tape, man that was done in '94 ... I think it was '93, actually ... I think I had just recently come from California or somewhere. I had been out of town, and I came back and went to Screw's house. You know, I used to get off the plane and go right to Screw house, and I went to Screw house and we was just chillin' and he was like, "E.S.G. on his way through. He fittin' to do a tape." They came through and ... man, I already knew how good this guy was. You know, and everybody used to just flow on the end of a Screw tape. You know, one freestyle song right at the end. And this tape here, this was the first tape that *I* know of, of anybody just ... doin' the *whole* tape, and this tape here he done, I think he had three or four guys with him, and on each song, just about every song, one of 'em fell off, you know? Until it was *all* E.S.G., which didn't take long. And just to see this guy ... see, you can hear his flow tapes and you would just say, "Yeah, this guy pretty good," but he flow so good that it sound like it could be written down. Because he's *that* good at it. And to *see* him do it live and to *know* he not writin' it down is just incredible. I mean, he has an uncanny skill that I've seen *few* MCs possess. I when I say "few" MCs, I mean MCs from New York possess it, like ... this guy got a *mad* flow. That's how E.S.G. is. You know, Snoop has that same ability. He can flow and make a hook and do another verse and remember that hook and come back with it and actually make three songs, you know? And this guy is so good at it, it's so remarkable, when I first seen him do it like that, I was like, "Man, this guy, he got it." And he really do have it. I don't know why it's took so long for him to get a major deal. Maybe people scared of him or what, I don't know. But he actually possesses the talent to do whatever in any kind of hip-hop he wants.

So you were there for the whole session then?

Yeah, I was there for the whole session. From start to end, and yeah, we started off, we were like, "Well, Screw ... this my partner DeMo, let's get us some drank." So we called up on little drank and next thing you know the magic started happenin'. Nothing was playing. Screw would just dig into the crate and throw on instrumentals, and they just *went.* And man, I mean to tell you, when I first got—this was a Screw tape *he* didn't even get. Nobody have it but me. Not even Screw had it, because *I* got the original. Somehow ... man, Screw was cool, so I could get to him, "Man, Screw, gimme that," you know, and he'd give it to me. Nobody had it, because right after this tape, that's when E.S.G. went to jail, so ... I always had it. A lot of people on Long Drive was always jammin' it 'cause I made plenty of dubs of it, and people on Long Drive knew about it and I guess people that knew us knew about it. And you know, I just always kept it and put it *up*, you know, because I knew it was special. And one day I just brought it out, you know, I didn't even ... when I heard Optimo Radio, I said, "This is the perfect opportunity for *everybody* to hear about it," because you know, there's stuff on the tape—Screw used some of the stuff, like there's a commercial on there, you know, "Keep your eyes on your Screw." That come off of that tape, and people are like, "Oh, that's where that come from," this and that. And just, when people heard it, it was like, "Wow." A lot of people thought it actually wasn't a Screw. They thought it was just freestyles that *I* put together. That's not my forte. I'm not a—well, I *can* DJ, but I'm not known as a DJ. I don't do that. I don't got the time to gather up somebody else flows and make a CD or a tape of it. I don't got that kind of time. And people finally realize, "Wow, it *was* actually a Screw tape." It was a Screw tape that really didn't even get slowed down because E.S.G. wrecked the *whole* tape! You'd have to leave space at the end of a Screw tape for Screw to come back and slow it down. A lot of people don't know, when you make a Screw tape, you make that regular speed, so it's not all slowed down and dragged out. We made everything regular speed, *then* Screw go back and slow it down. Well, he didn't get to *slow* this one down. I said, "Well, Screw, you gotta slow it *down* and give it to me." So he had to go buy a *110*-minute tape, and then slowed it down and then he gave it to me.

Yeah a lot of people don't realize that—that everything was recorded at regular speed and that he slowed it down on the turntables, but then he went back and slowed it down on the tape, too, didn't he? Like on the Tascam.

Exactly, exactly. That's exactly how. And people like ... people's goal was to get to Screw house, and so people that never knew that, and went to Screw and they, "Oh, that's regular speed!" Naw, that ain't how he do it. He slowed it down a little bit on the record whenever he could, 'cause you *have* to match up the speed of the records, blendin' in your records, so you have to slow down in some form right there, but when it was all said and done, he slowed down the whole tape, and that's what made it… I don't know why, when you slow music down… for some reason, to me and a lot of people, it sounds better. And it's crazy because, like I say, I'm a DJ, too, and I used to slow stuff down like that, too, but it was just… it wasn't nothin' like what *Screw* did. It's just like if it be a fast song, I'ma use MC Hammer, which I would never just listen to on the regular, but there's something about him real fast, I'd slow it down real, real slow, you know? I'd be like, "Man, that kinda sound good!" But I never thought nothin' like what Screw did, and when I ran into Screw and that's what he was doin', I was like, "Man, I had that kinda idea like that, too!" And he was like, "Yeah, man, I just did it one day and, people thought I was trippin' but I did my first tape like that and everybody was like *lemme buy one!*" He didn't have no price for those tapes. Somebody say, "I'll give you $10 for it," and he's like, "You'll give me *$10?!*" He was like, "Shoot, that's like if I sold a rock! Shoot… I'll sell it to you for 10!" And then the guy come back and give him a list full of songs and say, "Make me a tape like that." You know, "Okay, but I'ma charge you $15." "Okay, whatever you charge!" So a personal tape became $15, and if you just wanted a dub, they were $10. But every Screw tape—*every* Screw tape—is somebody's personal tape.

And do you remember the first time you ever went over there? Did you meet him before you ever went to his house or did you just get taken to his house by somebody?

My sister always was a popular girl, and she knew Screw. She had been tellin' me about this guy because she knows I'm a hip-hop head to the fullest. KYOK had the radio station 1590 Raps. That's what we was listening to back then on the AM dial. And she was tellin' me, "DeMo, I got this homeboy, and he a DJ. I want you to meet him." She said, "You need to meet him, DeMo, you gonna like this dude. I'm tellin' you, man. He remind me of you. He be makin' mixtapes and he don't do nothin' but old school D.M.C., Fat Boys, stuff like that." I was like, "Well, I don't care. I can make my *own* tapes, you know?" She was like, "Man, I'm tellin' you, you need to meet him." So one day I go over to her house, and she playin' this tape with Run–D.M.C. on it. It's mixed up real good, and I'm like, "Why is the pitch of it so slow like that?" And she's like, "Man, that's my homeboy I been tellin' you about! That's why I put it on! I just put it on when you came in." And I was like, "Well, whoever he is, he *is* a DJ for real. He mixin' his ass off. It's slow, but I like it like that. It sound pretty good to me." And she like, "I'm tellin' you he a good DJ, man. *You need to see him.*" I was like, "Well, maybe I will meet him one day." So about a week later I'm at the house, and my sister call me. She says, "DeMo, I need you to go pick up my tape, from my homeboy I was tellin' you about." And I was like, "Now you fittin' to send me to this man house?" I was like, "I don't wanna go over this man house, man, it's a different time of night. You don't just go over somebody house that you don't know. You say he got all this equipment and stuff, he gonna think I'm tryin' to get him or something." She like, "Man, I done paid for this tape, DeMo. He stay right down the street. Go over there *please*." I went over there. She had paged him. Cell phones weren't a popular thing back then, and he came out and I came out and he talkin' about, "So you Tasha brother?" I was like, "Yeah, I'm Tasha brother, man." He's like, "Man, your sister don't never stop talkin' about you. She been wantin' me to meet you for months, man. She always been tellin' me about you." I was like, "She done the same thing with you!" I'm kinda low key, man. I don't always wanna be poppin' up on people. He say, "So what you do, you a DJ, you rap or whatever?" I said, "Man, I been rappin' since the Sugar Hill Gang. When I heard that, I knew that was me." And I say, "Nobody ever wanted to help me, so I had to become my own DJ, and learn how to make beats, and when I started improvin', they *really* wasn't helpin' me, so I was just always on my own." He like, "Well, man, I DJ, I get down." And man, we talked for *hours*, just right in his driveway. And that day was the same day I met Fat Pat, I met Hawk, I met a bunch of more other people, but I can remember him tellin' me how much he had love for Fat Pat and Hawk, that's what made it stick with me. And we just... I'm talkin' about, man, we talked for *hours*. It was daylight, and I can remember my sister kept pagin' me 'cause she wanted her *tape!* And I was like, "Man, I'm out here talkin' with this dude, you know..." And we just talked. I remember people comin' over to his house and people that was callin' and he was like, "Well, I'm talkin' to my homeboy right now." He just disregarded *everybody* when me and him was talkin'. And from *that* moment on, me and Screw was just tight, tight, tight. He was like, "Well, come over here tomorrow man! And I'll show you what I do." And I came over there... and man, I was just amazed, so amazed by what he did. I was like, "I been lookin' for you for years and didn't know it, man. I'm a hip-hop head." So the next time I went over there, I gave him *all* my records. Every record I owned, I gave it to Screw. I said, "I know you got a lot of records, but maybe I got something you don't have." And I can remember one of the first Screw tapes I did, it was alternative music. It wasn't really actually alternative music, but it wasn't rap. It had Queen on there, and Boy George, stuff like that, because I listened to *everything*, you know? I wasn't just prejudiced with music. I respect *any* good music no matter what it is. And we made that tape, and I was surprised he had those records. I was like, "You got Queen 'We Will Rock You' and 'Another One Bites The Dust'?" You could just throw songs out and he would go to his library, "I got it right here!" And we made a tape on the fly without a... I think that's the only tape he made without a list. And we made that tape, man, and I was like. "The next one, I'ma just go hood with it! We gonna jam." And, you know, we just started pushin' our tapes. I was makin' a tape... at least once a week I was makin' a tape. Sometimes twice a week. You know, Screw was 24/7, man. He hardly got *any* rest. You know, he'd work and go hard all day, and you'd leave Screw house at 8, 9, 10 in the morning, and you'd be back over there about 1. He got *very* little sleep, and it was really kinda amazin', especially due to the fact that he was *sippin' codeine all day*! And I can remember... you know, I knew about codeine and cough syrup, stuff like that already because I'm from that kind of family that always hustled, you know. My grandpa, you know... so I knew about that stuff, man. I used to always ask, "Man, what you drinkin' in them wine coolers?" He'd have a four-pack of wine coolers, and he'd put an ounce of cough syrup in each one of them. He was like, "Man, I'm drinkin' syrup." I was like, "Syrup? Like *cough syrup*?" He like, "Yeah, man. It taste all right." I'm like, "Man, that ain't my party, but you *mixin'* it with something..." I say, "Man, I see people drink that stuff *straight!* You... you mixin' it up!" He was like, "Man, I can't take it like that. It's too strong. I just wanna... sip it and relax a little bit." I was like, "Okay, whatever." And it got popularized, you know, it just... everybody just started doin' it because I guess... you talk about it on a Screw tape... whatever was happenin' on a Screw tape, everybody was emulating whatever was happenin'. And that's what—it was *crazy* how this stuff took off, man! It seemed like overnight it just took off, you know. If you wasn't jammin' Screw, you wasn't *jammin'*. If you was a rap artist in *this* country, you wasn't sellin' in Houston unless you touched one of those Screw tapes. 'Cause we didn't know about you, man. We didn't know about you. *Guys* don't buy records *anyway*, but if you *that good*, there was a respect thing where you gotta go buy the 8Ball & MJG because it's *that* jammin'. You ain't gonna *listen* to it, but you gonna buy it, because you gonna get yours slowed down by Screw. So we... you'd buy a cassette or a CD, and just put it up and, "Screw, man, I need you to slow down this whole thing for me." And Screw will have it for you, the same day it come out. He'd go and slow it down and, you know, the rest is history, man. That stuff took off. I mean, people were jammin' Screw, but it was, you know... a few people in the neighborhood. Maybe a bunch of Bigtyme dudes, that knew Screw, knew how to get in touch with... because people still didn't know where Screw *was*. When I met him, he had *just* moved on Greenstone. *Just* moved there.

And that's known as the Screw house. You know, "That's Screw's house!"

Off Reveille, right? Reveille and Greenstone?

Yes, yes, that's it. Well, really off Poplar, but we say Reveille because that's the major street. Everybody knew about that. Like some people knew where he stayed, but you couldn't get in ... you know, you'd have to get *in* to Screw's house. A lot of people came, knocked on the door, "I wanna get a tape." You know, like a little candy store. They could *do* that, but to get *inside* was a major deal, and I remember it started blowin' up, blowin' up, and he got the gate. And you know, "Aw, man. Screw done put up a *fence!* Man, aw man ..." It was like he had to get through the fence 'cause you know, you had to knock on the *side* door. The front door was enclosed by burglar bars, so you couldn't ring the doorbell. So if you didn't have his number, and now you can't knock on the *side* door, you couldn't get to Screw. And Screw loved it *just like that.* Because he wanted just people he trusted to be able to get him. So if you didn't have that pager number, you wasn't gettin' to him. And then, you know, people would pass by ... people would pass by and wait for a car to pull up, wait to catch that gate open or a line formin' at that gate, and that was ... *boom*! that was they chance, man. And it was just people in the *know.* It was people from the Northside *and* the Southside. Let me repeat that: It was people from the Northside *and* the Southside. It was never *just* a Southside thing, but more people on the South knew about it because it was *on* the Southside. Houston always been Northside/Southside, and it just turned it into a plex thing because, you know, people would hear Herschelwood this and Martin Luther King [Boulevard] that, and on the Northside, they want to hear you say *Homestead!* But *we wasn't from Homestead,* so we wasn't saying Homestead. And then with the event of people startin' to jack for cars and ... you know, you got people stealin' cars and sayin', you know, somebody from the Southside steal somebody from the Southside car, they'll leave a note: *YEAH, THE NORTHSIDE RUN THIS.* Knowin' good and damn well it wasn't nobody from the Northside. The Northside did the *same thing.* So they was buildin' stuff up and, you know, makin' the Northside hate the Southside more, making the Southside hate the Northside more until you got your spinoff, like your Michael Watts and all of that. And that's how all of that came about, because they wanted they own Screw, too! They had rappers, they had MCs, they wanted to stress they skills but they knew they couldn't get in Screw house. That was a no-no. They knew it wouldn't happen. That's what made all of the enemy stuff happen, and it really wasn't really *that bad* as people think, but when you listen to Screw all day and you hearin' people say this and that about the Northside ... if you a outsider, you diggin' all the way into it, this and that. It wasn't really as bad as people made it out to be.

It was really an echo of what was going on in L.A., too. The West Coast/East Coast thing that was happening in rap at that point. A lot of people got attached to that. A lot of people kind of romanticized that, you know, East Coast versus West Coast. And that just kind of fostered its own little reflection in Houston.

Exactly. That's exactly what it was. Especially with the East Coast/West Coast thing because we feel like we in the middle lane. We down South, so we wasn't with nobody. But the prominent music was coming from the West Coast, so a lot of people down here was like, "I like Snoop, I like Dre. Dre be jammin', Eazy-E be jammin', man. I'm not likin' no Wu-Tang." You know, a lot of guys down South, we wasn't *likin'* that East Coast because of the beats. They had more of a hip-hop-rooted beats, more to the roots of hip-hop, but the beats wasn't ... you know, we love our cars down South, and if it couldn't bang in the car and sound rhythmatic and sounded real good, we wasn't likin' it. Because it wouldn't sound good in our car.

The East Coast stuff was too fast.

Yes, exactly. And then, you know, East Coast rappers were still rappin' about *rappin'*. You know, they would rap about *rappin'*, and people down South didn't care about Farmers Boulevard. They ain't *seen* Farmers Boulevard. They ain't even seen the Eastern *Time*

Zone, so they didn't care about that. They just wanted a good beat to ride to and say somethin' they could relate to. So that made a lot of people down South—and in other areas, I imagine, too—say, "Well, we like the West Coast rap." But down here in Houston, we always had our own little hip-hop scene. And people around the country wasn't feelin' us, we never felt—we've had this discussion before—it wasn't *cool* to be from H-Town. And Screw made it *cool* to be from H-Town. He made it cool to say "H-Town," "Southside, that's where I'm from." By trade, I do hazardous material handling, so I was travelin' all over the country, and I was seein' all kinds of hip-hop and rap acts, you know. And so I had a lot to choose from. I had a lot of different styles from a lot of different coasts, and I liked nothin' but West Coast and down South, so that's what we gravitated to. And when the movement really started happenin' down here, people were like, "You like the East Coast or West Coast?" "Nah, I like the *South*. I like anything from the South." But these people had a harder time fittin' in with the South! Because when people think of the South, they think Florida, they think Atlanta, they think New Orleans ... they were leavin' us out because we were in Texas. Well, it wasn't our fault that Texas is so big it can be in the South *and* the Midwest, you know? Dallas is, you know, Dallas is a totally different beast from Houston. Totally different. They got different kinds of food and everything. I mean, we got the ... like I told a lot of people that I knew from New Orleans, that Louisiana is the Bayou State—Houston is the Bayou *City*. We had so many bayous we had to cement 'em. So we had our own crisis goin' on just bein' accepted as the *South*, but the people in Houston knew that a lot of the music from the South was still just a copy off what we did in Houston. And a lot of people that's not ignorant to the facts realize a lot of the hip-hop today is originated off what Houston did. You know, Screw made it like that because you got the guys from New Orleans that come over, and they come to Screw house and they'd *buy* 100 Screw tapes, and they'd *hear* what we flow about, like diamond grills, candy paint, drank in our cup, and then you got guys like Master P that went to U of H, that was a Houston/New Orleans/L.A.—well, I ain't gonna say L.A.—we'll say Richmond ...

Lil' Wayne, same thing.

Exactly. Well I say Master P and them first and *then* come the Hot Boys. And those guys just rapped about what we rapped about, you know, on the Screw tapes. And it just blew up for them, and they made it seem like we were copyin' them! When actually, we'd been doin' this since '91, man, c'mon! And so a lot of people was like, "Well, you know, we know that's our style, you know we did the diamonds and drank." I've had diamonds in my grill since *1991*, man. I mean '*91*. You don't realize how far back that was, and I got the idea from Slick Rick, you know, because Slick Rick was a flashy guy. Slick Rick was from *England*, so he was about royalty and bein' the king and, you know, like people live in England. That's why he was Slick Rick The Ruler. It was crazy about Slick Rick because we didn't know studio magic. We didn't know about 24-track or 48-track ... we would hear somebody ... you hear Rakim say "48-track." I had no idea what that was, you know? But when we found out—because there's a lot of studios in Houston, but they didn't let *us* in. You know, they ain't lettin' us in. We beatboxin' and spittin' on the mic. They don't wanna hear that. And so when we start findin' out more about it and learnin' more about it, you know, you had people that knew *some* stuff. What helped it was these band guys. The guys that were in the *band*. These guys that played the *piano*. *These* guys helped music down here in Houston—helped hip-hop grow, because they knew about tracks. They knew about musical notes. They knew how to read music. They knew how to play anything with keys. They knew that stuff. So, you grab those guys, you grab the dude that played the piano or the organ in the church, 'cause you say, "Oh, I think I need them." So you grab him and you put him on your team, and then you take the guy that plays that *one drum* in the band. You grab him, and you pull him with you, and now you got you a production crew. Well, let's find out what this 808 is. "Well, I can't get a 808." "Well, let's get a 505." I remember the first drum machine I had was a 505, and *you couldn't tell me nothin'!* I thought I was Davy DMX Mantronix, man! Because, you know, in the early days, there wasn't no tunes in rap music. It was just raw *drums*. And so we take these drums and we program them to … well, the first thing I did with my drum machine was try to recreate every beat I heard. I was like, "Okay, I gotta do the Run–D.M.C. beat, I gotta do that." So we learned those beats and then, you know, you start tampering with it: "Well, I want my own beat ain't nobody heard," you know. But you don't know how to play, so in come the guy that plays the *one drum*. And then you be like, "Man, you gotta, we gotta get these beats and we gotta get these tunes, you know." You go through all your records and you get Stevie Wonder … and you put that over a beat you, "Aw, man I just made—aw man I made me a beat! I'm good!" Well, all of the sudden, hip-hop start changin'. People start seein' money in it. Well, you can't just sample people records no more. Now they wanna get paid. So that's where the guy that play the piano in the church come in. "Man, can you come up with my *own* tune?" "Yeah I can do it!" "Uh-oh. Now I got my *own* tune and my own beat. You can't tell me *nothin'!*" And then, you know, that's where it go. You just start from there, and just … it got better and better and better. By the time you really *in* a real studio—'cause everybody had a pro studio in their houses by then. We had 4-track machines—you know, you couldn't tell us nothin' with them little 4-tracks. We were so happy. "I got one disc for the beat, I got one disc for the tune and I got *two* tracks to rap on! Aw *man!*" It was incredible to us, you know? It was so amateur, but it was *so* necessary at the time.

And it's magical, because it's your ideas. You're creating this stuff that comes from your head and your heart and you're able to actually put it down on a tape.

Yes, and see, magical—that's the *key* word. That is the actual key word, because music is magic. I heard that a long time ago. I heard Quincy Jones say that, and I didn't know what he meant until I started actually goin' to the studio, because you plan a song out one way—it might not come out that way. You know, we've had songs that we've done that had a hook that went this way, but guess what? That chorus didn't even get *used* because magic happened—and you can't stop the magic, man. Magic controls *itself*. You get in there, somethin' happen, this turns into that, and it is *magical*. People that's not *into* the music really can't understand it to the point like me and you do, because they've never been *around* it. But when you get in that lab, man, and it just *takes over*, it's *magical*. I mean you *know* it's magic. You know that it wasn't just *all* you. You know it was somethin' else drivin' that shit to what it is, because it's *meant* to be this way. Like Michael Jackson was *meant* to make music and sing songs. He was born to do that, whether people realize it or not. And that's how it can be with this music—it becomes another animal all in itself. I've been in the studio and we've made a song and "I don't want this on it," "Don't want this," and that and that. And you play with it all day and night, and it comes out a totally different way, which is really the better way. Sometimes you can overproduce a song, and it'll mess it up.

Speaking on Screw, I interviewed Z-Ro the other night and he said something to the effect of, "What are you gonna do when you got to Screw's house? Are you just gonna be a homeboy, who just hangs out, or are you going to be a rapper?" You go in there and you see this dude in the corner writing, this guy over here is writing … it made people really step up their game.

Exactly. It motivates you. And see like with me, I was rappin' and always *did* rap, but like I say, it wasn't popular anymore. It wasn't cool to put on your Kangol and your Cazals. People looked at you like a fool. But when you was really just a b-boy. So I was the b-boy, and when I met Screw, it brought *everything* back for me. You know, it made me mad—"you keep on writin', man. Keep on doin' my songs, man. We in here." You know, you see—there's a lot of guys that didn't rap before they knew Screw, man. You gotta—like you say, people be in Screw house, and they see people makin' lists, and then you see Fat Pat over there, writin' him a rhyme. "Man, I'ma do me a song, man! I'm fittin' to put these on my tape. Real throwed, man!" And he be like, "Man, who is that—oh that's …"

People come up to me, "DeMo, I been writin', man." And you be like, "Oh yeah? You been writin'? Lemme hear what you got!" And people just kept on 'til they got better. And like ... *June 27th* turned a lot of people into artists, too. 'Cause I can remember Clay Doe—Clay Doe wasn't a rapper. He was just a guy that knew everybody. I remember we did the *June 27th* and he told me, "DeMo, I will never ever miss my chance to get on that microphone and wreck again. *Ever.* Ever. Because I was there for the *June 27th*, and I shoulda been on that tape rappin'." And I remember, next time I saw Clay Doe, he was like, "DeMo, check this out." I was like, "Man, I'm feelin' this music." Next thing I know, he in a group called Laftex and they got records out and in the stores! Now that's what I'm talkin' about. So you got ... well, we might say "Screw artists," but you got artists that's just out here because of Screw. A lot of people owe they whole shine to Screw. We would never have had Keke or Fat Pat, you know? We would have never had those guys. Now, E.S.G. a different story, 'cause he was already rappin'. He was already in the professional mode. But Screw, he just made it that much more better because people was wantin' to hear what he had to say. 'Cause you had ... you had Street Military, you know, you had those guys, you had Scarface or whatever, but Scarface ... you rappin' with the big boys. And we wanted somebody who was talkin' about these little *side* streets, you know? Wanted to hear about Herschelwood, wanna hear about *Perry* Street, you know? We don't wanna just hear about South Acres or Fifth Ward. We wanna hear these other streets that we go down. We wanna hear about this stuff. And so you got pocket rappers comin' out of *every*where. You know, it was just a whole—you know, it was just like a mini-New York, just right here in Houston. And then you got—there's a lot of studios here now, you know. "Just Us." He was on Hiram Clarke, and he did a lot of good music, but then you had Maestro, you know, rest in peace. Maestro came from the East Coast, and he said—I don't know what he saw down here, but he was able to get down here to Houston and help the rappers, you know. I remember his studio was called "Just Us," and it was just rappers, you know. And I remember finding out about him from KTSU, on Kidz Jamm, and you'd go by and see the studio, you seen 24-tracks, you seen all this stuff you see in a major studio in *his* house. He didn't have a sound booth, but he still had good quality sound, and there was no noise in the background, and it just opened your eyes up to, "Wow, this is in Houston, where I can *get* to it, and he chargin' these prices, so I can be able to make me a professional song." And you know, people—we stopped usin' the word "demo," because if you goin' to the studio, and you gettin' your stuff mixed and mastered, then this ain't a demo. This just a song that's just not *out,* you know? So it got more and more professional. A lot of people went to Maestro. He did a lot of Geto Boys stuff. He did a *lot* of stuff for a lot of artists in Houston people just didn't know about, but he was there for us to access. And then more and more studios popped up everywhere.

Do you remember when Screw started producing? I mean he was DJing for a long time, but he started producing piece by piece ...

See, that's a twist. He had a group called Triple Threat, and I had ... I was in Sam Goody Music, I think it was still Pickwick. It was Pickwick Music, and the guys knew me in the store 'cause they know I'm comin' to buy every rap record there is. And the guy say, "I don't know who these guys are but they from Houston ..." I said, "Well lemme have it!" I didn't care who they are or what they say, if they're from Houston, I'm supportin' 'em. So I bought it, and I had that little tape—man, there's some all right little music on there. I can remember it bein' a little mini-hit, you know? And unbeknownst to me, that DJ was Screw. And I remember hearin' him say, "Screw this, Screw that," but it never dawned onto me that it was *my* Screw! And when I met Screw, "You know, I do a little bit of producin', too, with this here group Triple Threat." I say, "Well I *got* that! I bought that record without even hearin' it man! 'Cause they said they were from Houston! That's you, huh?!" He said, "Yeah, that's me they talkin' 'bout, Screw." I said "Yeah, man, I *got* that record!" I said, "Man, put that on my Screw tape. I got that!" So, he was producin' back then, but there wasn't too many people knew he was producin'. But we were some young kids. We were like 15, 16. And it was amazing to me that he was producin', too, and nobody knew him. And then, like, when this Screw music took off, more people were ... well, you got your Screw artists, your Kekes, were like, "Shoot, Screw house—I want you to be my DJ!" or whatever, so he would do things like, "Well, I made this little beat right here." I said "Aw, Screw, that's tight! What you gonna do with that?" "Well, Keke gonna use it. He got this little song called 'Pimp Tha Pen,' you know what I'm sayin', and I'm gonna let him do it, you know, 'cause when he got hot, man, he came with this little song called 'Pimp Tha Pen,' and I made the beat for him." And he said, "I'ma do the *3 'N The Mornin'* and we gonna put it in the *stores*!" I said, "You gonna put it in the *stores*?!" "Yeah man, we gonna put it in the *stores*, man." "Aw, man—how you gonna pull that out?" He said, "Man, it's a lot of hard work, but we gonna do it some kind of way." And I can remember I took him there every day—I don't know how many days it take to do *3 'N The Mornin'*, but I took him there every day except for the days that Big Moe went and the days that Keke went. So I was there for the—actually, I engineered *3 'N The Mornin'*, and man, I can remember him goin' in there and he'd say, "Yeah, I'ma put Al-D right here ..." You know, he had his vision of how he wanted it. 'Cause, you know, a lot of people don't know that *3 'N The Mornin'* is not the true *3 'N Da Mornin'*. *3 'N Da Mornin'* is one of the first Screw tapes that he made, with four turntables. It was some real amazin' stuff to me, because, you know, I'm a hip-hop head. I know what this hip-hop is, and I was like, "Man, this guy pullin' out the four turntables, man. I mean, you know, we got New York down South, man. This dude really a DJ. Don't *sleep* on him." And you know, like Scarface had the song "Let Me Roll," and you have a part on there where he say, "Listenin' to a tape that my partner had made / 'Growin' up in the Hood' bein' mixed with Face." Well, that was actually the original *3 'N Da Mornin'*. Now why he didn't say "jammin' to a tape that Screw had made," we don't know. But, you know, blah blah, this and that, maybe it's political, but that's what he was talkin' about. So Screw really had the skills, and more people was comin' in—you know, people didn't wanna rap for nobody *but* Screw. You know, if you wasn't Screw, people didn't even want you to *hear* them rap, because *they* wanted to mix with *Screw*. And he started puttin' beats together, you know, pullin' stuff up, I'm like, "Man, Screw, you is out of line, man." I said, "What you gonna be? A DJ, producer, you gonna start rappin' one day? Man, Screw, you rappin', too? Man, this is gonna be gold." He just started pullin' stuff off. Not because he could, but just because it was *in* him. It was *in* him. It was like ... Screw was a pioneer. He would be like, "What can I do next?" Just DJin' wasn't enough, man. This guy's an entrepreneur, you know?

He wanted to produce, like he really wanted to make music. That was one of things he wanted to do forever, right?

Yes, yes! That's what I'm sayin'—he had a whole vision. He had a book, and pages where he wanted to turn and go to, and he would *do* it. I mean, it just was a trip how people that knew Screw—anybody that knew Screw, and anybody that met Screw—he *had* something. He done something to you. He made you wanna be on his team. People wanted to help him, you know. I mean, *everybody* wanted to help Screw. I guess people knew that it was something special, that something's gonna grow from it. I don't know. I can't explain it. You know, you just have to be around it to understand it. People wanted to help this dude as much as he helped other people. And it was like, "Man, I gotta do this so Screw can do *this*. Screw helped me put this down—lemme see if I can get him in the door with this dude." And that's just how it was, man. It was like, you hear a lot of Screwed Up Click members like myself, we say "Screw love." That means "Let's do it for Screw," know what I'm sayin'? We might say, "We gonna have to do a show for Screw love." And people be like "Screw love?" Well, it's Screw love. You got to do it and represent Screw. Not represent for yourself, you represent for *Screw*. Because, you know, our boy ain't here no more, and it's kinda crazy that I can remember when I first start messin' with Screw. He say, "DeMo, I'ma *Screw the world*." It went from

"I *wanna* Screw the world," to "*I'm gonna Screw the world*." And it was like, "Screw, yeah, you know, you *is* gonna Screw the world, man." I'm like, "'Cause people lovin' this." You know, 'cause like it was a trip—it went from Houston, it went from the Southside to the Northside, to Texas City to Galveston ... it pushed on. It pushed east, you know, when you talk Houston, a lot of people don't know you talk Houston, you talkin' New Orleans, too. They've always been connected for some reason. I guess it's that I-10 thing. Maybe the drug trade. I don't know, but it went from Houston to Louisiana, to Alabama, Mississippi ... it just took over the whole South. And Atlanta was in the picture, you know. And so we were doin' our thing, man, and like you got these groups—you had your Outkast, you had all these Southern groups, and if you'd hear people shout out to Screw and you'd be like, "Man, they shout out Screw and they ain't even in Houston, jammin' Screw and they sippin' that drank ... that's where I'm from. They talkin' about my dude DJ Screw. That's my dude, you know." Screw was your dude, and if you knew Screw, you feel like just *you* knew him. You feel like you know him the *best*, because he'd give ... he'd give everybody that attention that they need or want, you know. If he dealin' with Lance, he dealin' with *Lance* at the time, you know. It ain't even gonna be—he, "Okay, DeMo, I acknowledge, but man, I'm messin' with *Lance* right now. So lemme mess with Lance." And that's what made so many people gravitate toward Screw, because he never highsided you, you know. He never acted funny. He didn't *kinda* speak to you if he saw you somewhere. He *spoke* to you. "Oh, look, there go my boy—lemme give my boy some daps—man, what's up? What you been—you ain't been *by the house*, man. That *ain't cool*, man ..." You'd be like, "Damn, Screw!" Yeah, that's my potnah, Screw.

So many people I talk to refer to Screw as one of their best friends. "Me and Screw were super tight." And, you know, it's almost to the exclusion of anything else that people say, "Oh man I was with Screw every day." Screw was the centerpiece and he just reached out to everybody.

Exactly, man ... times we went to Screw house ... there wasn't no mixin' goin' on. We were just *chillin'*. You know, there were days where we just chilled. Ask anybody. Ask Keke, E.S.G ... some days we just chilled like potnahs chill, and just smoke a couple of squares. We *did* that, because, it was ... like I say, Screw wasn't just a music dude. He was a good all-around *man*, you know what I'm sayin'? You *can* chill with Screw without havin' to hear music. And that's what it *was*, man! He was just—you know, everybody you come into, they tell you, "Screw was my dude." He know how to make everybody feel like he was their number one friend. I don't know ... he was *meant* to be DJ Screw. That's what it was. He always made you feel like ... *wanted*, you know? "Now that's my potnah DeMo. He put out the baddest Screw tape!" "Aw, man, shut up Screw." "Dude, man, you make the baddest lists!" And he used to always say, "I like doin' *your* tapes, DeMo, 'cause you know what you *want*." You know, read your Screw tape and read everything that was on the latest Screw tape on *your* Screw tape. You gonna get a song ain't *nobody* heard. That *you* know is jammin' and everybody don't know it's jammin', but *you* know it's jammin'. And you put it on your tape and everybody be like, "Yeah! That's jammin'!"

What was the shockwave like, I mean, when Screw passed ... do you remember what everybody was saying, what you were feeling?

Oh man ... I can remember crying, and I just ... every moment I had with Screw just splashed before my eyes—and I met him, standin' next to him, talkin' to him for hours, you know, meetin' Fat Pat—it was just like a whole bunch of pictures, just fields that flashed through my head—and I just broke down, like, "Wow, man, you know ... he's dead." I'm tearin' up now, because it was just so *real*, you know? Bad news travels *fast*, and ... aw man, I turned on the radio and The Box was talkin' about it—you know, none of us liked the radio station, because, you know, they wasn't playin' *us*. And they was talkin' about it, they were playin' *June 27th* and ... aw, man, I can just remember—it was like that one day turned into such a long day. It was like each hour went by in 60 seconds and then slowed down, and went by slow, slow, slow, slow, slow… And, you know, people *still* didn't *believe* it. I had *so many great memories* with Screw. Not just music, you know—talkin' about religion, or talkin' about other good people, and… you know, his family issues… I became close with Al-D because of Screw. Me and Screw and Al-D, we ran together for maybe six months, every day together, just us three just talkin' and doin' stuff—not even makin' tapes, you know? I can remember we used to ride around—I was drivin' a station wagon back then. I can remember us ridin' around the city, just hangin' with Screw, talkin', you know, about *life* and what's right and what's wrong. Racial—racial shit, all kind of shit. Just struggles as a black man. You know, Screw was a short, kinda light-skinned dude, and I'm a big old dark dude. It's different struggles bein' a black man if you dark, and if you dark and you *big*. It all boils down to what shit you went through. We used to talk about *so much*, and you know, it was just all *over*. It's just all *over* just like that. Just like *that*. It's just *over* with, and it's just… a lot to deal with, and I can remember so many people wanted to know about the funeral and stuff like that. I did not go to Screw's funeral. That wasn't an ambition of mine. I didn't need to pay respect. Screw was my potnah for *real*. It wasn't just music. I knew his family, you know what I'm sayin'. I *met* his mom, I met his dad, I met his sister. You know, I *knew* his people, and I didn't *need* the funeral to let people see me at Screw funeral to say, "Yeah, I was at Screw's funeral." I had too many good memories of Screw to have the last memory—seein' my… my nigga, my potnah, my *loc*… up there like that, can't do nothing for his self. I'd rather have those good memories. A lot of other people got that memory of him like that, so I'll let them have that. I'ma just keep these good memories in my head of DJ Screw, man. I can remember, man, how—I mean, people just didn't wanna let it *go*, man, because it just—it just couldn't be true, man. But it *was*. This was our voice, this was our medium. This is how we got out our stresses, whatever we needed to say about music in general or anything that was goin' on. I mean, we talked about it on Screw tapes, during the intermissions: "Yeah I wanna say a shout out to Clinton, 'cause my mama opened a new business." You know, stuff like that. He was our avenue, man, and it was *gone* just like that, man. God don't show favoritism. He'll take anybody out of here, you know? And it was—people were like, "Well, what'd he die of?" This and that… none of that stuff was important, man. The important thing was *we lost Screw*. We lost *our* Kid Capri. We lost our voice. It was just so devastatin', man…

How did people deal with it?

A lot of people deal with it by jamming more Screw. A lot of people went into seclusion. You didn't hear from 'em for a while, because every person that knew Screw, he touched 'em. If *you* met Screw, he touched *you*. I mean, so many people met Screw just in Sam's [Club], buyin' up thousands of blank tapes. People wouldn't know who he was but they'd figure it out real quick. "Man this dude got a whole bunch of—he's buyin' a whole lot of… grey tapes! Why would somebody need 1,000 blank tapes? That's *got* to be DJ Screw! Is this DJ Screw?" "Yeah, that's DJ…" "Aw, man!" you know. People would go crazy, and I remember people that I knew, we was like sullen—we was like in a state of *pause* almost, because, you know, at the same time, we knew it was true, but it *couldn't* be true. It *couldn't* be true! You know how many years I been listenin' to Screw, you tellin' me he *gone*? You know, the Screw shop—we got the Screw shop now, and you tellin' me he gone? He done busted out to Mo City, pickin' up money and revenue, makin' this world better, and he gone? You know, Screw made a shine for people—people knew about me, but people *really* know about me now, because of Screw. You know, people know about Keke because of Screw. People know about—you got Screw artists—Keke is a Screw artist, I'm a Screw artist, Fat Pat a Screw artist. Hawk a Screw artist. A lot of people wouldn't have never rapped if it wasn't for Screw, you know? We woulda never gotten heard of *period* without Screw bein' our outlet. And it just—it closed a page, but at the same time, it opened another page because people took it that much more serious. People stopped sippin' drank as much, because we not sure if this is why he died, but it had to be a part of it, so let's be a little bit more responsible. We *do* have kids. We do got family. We do got people that depend on us, that count on us to be there today, tomorrow, a year from now, 10 years from now, and we gotta be here for them. So let's not drink as much. Let's not drink the whole pint, man. Let's just sip—you know, a deuce is enough. You know, drank is like weed. You get so high on weed, you can't get no higher. But once you leanin' on drank, you can't get no—you can't get no more leaner! You can't. So it helped people stop abusin' drugs as much. People just didn't just quit, but they started bein' more conscious of what they were doin' to they self, they body. Once you tap that liver, man, it's *over*. You can't get a transplant on a liver if you ruin your liver with drugs. You can't get on the list. So, you know, people started openin' they minds up to ... you know, this ain't just for fun. This is a serious thing, and losin' Screw made everybody more focused with *their* music. "I gotta make it better. I gotta be more professional, 'cause I ain't got Screw to give me a stamp of approval now. I ain't got Screw to say "Yeah, this my boy Lil' Flip." You know, we ain't got that no more. We ain't got Screw sayin', "Yeah, that new Botany Boyz—go get that C-Note." We don't have that anymore. We gotta do that for ourselves. You know, there's people that never done shows without Screw. But guess what? You gotta do them without him now. And so, it was different, man. It was a different thang, you know. 'Cause it was *crazy* when we lost Fat Pat. And then we lost Screw. I mean, SUC people were fallin' off the map left and right. It was crazy. It was a real crazy, crazy thing.

(2011)

Lil' Troy

PRODUCER, RAPPER, BUSINESSMAN
SOUTH PARK'S DEAD END

A Southside drug dealer turned label owner in the late '80s, Troy is credited with bringing to the light a young rapper named DJ Akshen, who would later become Scarface. Troy is best known for his 1998 hit "Wanna Be A Baller," which featured Hawk, Yungstar, Lil' Will, and (posthumously) Fat Pat. The album on which that single appeared, Sittin' Fat Down South, *to date has sold almost two million copies. Troy still produces, and works in the strip club/after hours scene.*

Last time we spoke we were talking about how different Houston is at night, how it's such a late night town and how some people don't go out until the small hours. When do you think that came about, that modern era of late-night life in Houston?

What it's like in Houston—it's a whole new world, you know what I'm sayin'? After two o'clock in the morning, it's a whole new lifestyle, a whole new set of people be out, with a whole different mentality and everything. But it still be a party scene all night, though, at the same time.

What do you think is different about the people who don't go out until super late? People who can stay out that late …

Those self-employed people, most times, that stays out 'til five, six o'clock in the morning, that go out to the after hours. Most times they be self-employed people right there. They don't have a conventional job to go to at eight o'clock in the morning, for eight hours a day. No. They have their own hours. And they *party*. It's a different type of music a lot of times. You hear the street, gutter stuff. You don't hear the stuff you hear on the radio every day.

It's almost like a different set of rules at that point.

Pretty much it *is* a different set of rules 'cause you got different people in charge, you know? People that run the radio station during the daytime and now, early, they sleep. They don't live at that time of night.

Do you feel like there are phases in Houston where late night is really hot in Houston and then it'll taper off for a couple of years, or do you think it's a constant?

It's a constant. We've been doin' this after hours for a long time. It's just now startin' to catch on with the media and magazines and everybody, but this is what we normally do, you know what I'm sayin'? I used to not leave my house 'til after two o'clock in the morning to go out. 'Cause the clubs we used to go to, we could smoke after four. But we didn't want to *go* there 'til after two o'clock. And after four o'clock in the morning, it's a free for all. All the main clubs close, then you have Houston's after hours, so everybody from the main clubs will come to the after hours and it's still a big old party now. But it's different people runnin' the game. It's a different set of people that run the game at nighttime.

Have the strip clubs always been a component of that? They're not the only places open that late, but they're kind of a centerpiece in a lot of ways because they can be.

Nah, strip clubs—that ain't where after hours first start comin' from, from the strip clubs. Strip clubs didn't get popular bein' after hours. We always had after hour *clubs* down here. They wasn't no strip clubs, though. They was just regular after hours. We had a few strip clubs that was after hours, but our main thing has been after hours *period*. It was called *Members Only*. You had to have a member's card to come in at night and you'd drink free. You have a card, you pay somebody for a card when you come in and you drink free. That comes from the *Members Only* clubs we was doin' at first.

Where was that?

Southside, Southwest side. That was the main—Holmes Road, South Park. We kept after hours.

So the strip clubs weren't a catalyst, then. The strip clubs were just a part of it when they came along.

Yeah, 'cause the strip clubs would stay open late and they was taboo. They wasn't goin' by the rules neither. So anytime you got an after hour club, you not actually goin' by the rules. Unless you got a Members Only. You got a Members Only, that way you could get *away* with all this drinkin' and everything in the club. See, you not supposed to sell liquor after two o'clock. You can't tell that's the case down here, though, 'cause we have liquor all night, 'til six, seven, eight o'clock in the morning.

Do you think those after-hours places were able to avoid the police because of where they were in town—on the Southside?

Nah, really, mainly, if you ain't cause a bunch of problems, and you ain't got a bunch of shootings and stuff like that, the police will let you make it. Laws—you ain't killin', a bunch of fightin' and shootin', they ain't gonna mess with you. They'll see a bunch of cars there, ain't gonna bother it. It's not a big disturbance.

Do you think the MacGregor Park era—the big parties with Darryl Scott DJing in the early '80s, do you think that was a jump off point for the car culture we see today, or was it earlier than that?

It was earlier than that. When Martin Luther King Boulevard was South Park [Boulevard], we all had cars and we would all meet up at MacGregor Park. But we was doin' that before MacGregor Park. See, MacGregor Park was sittin' right next to a rich neighborhood, and the white folks didn't want us in they neighborhood too much. So it was hard for us to go down there at first. They didn't want us down there—all the cars and all the noise ridin' up in the neighborhood. So we rode up and down MLK Boulevard. And down into the Dead End. We rode from Bellfort and OST all the way down to Dead End. We rode up and down MLK.

So like before "MacGregor Park?" Before '83 or so.

Yeah we're talkin' 'bout the early '80s.

MacGregor Park started getting really popular in '82, '83, right?

Ah I think maybe after that. It was after that. It was after that ... '84, '85, yeah 'cause we was ridin' elbows then. We put on elbows in '84.

How different was the South Park of the early '80s from now?

Ah, man, there was so many live cars out and sippin' ... everybody just partied and rollin' around them streets. We used to break 'em off. See, "break 'em off" came from us in South Park. We would break the street off and pull in front of you at the red light, right? We'd block the street off and let all the cars that's behind us come by. Breakin' 'em off.

Just pull into the intersection.

Yeah, we'd stop at a red light, and what I would do is I would pull up and block the cars coming from the east, and my other potnah would block the cars comin' from the west and everybody's comin' from the south, ridin' straight on through, you feel what

I'm sayin'? Right before the last car leaves, he'll let the cars comin' from the west and I'll let the cars comin' from the east… they'd all take off. So we'd ride down the street with 40, 50 cars from the neighborhood, block every intersection that we goin' down! We didn't have to worry about no video cameras or nothing. There was no cameras at the red lights or nothing. So we would just come on through, and just block the street off all the way down, 30 or 40 cars deep. That's something you can't do nowadays. A lot of times you'll see the red line, the blue line, the gold line, they ridin' together, but you can't break 'em off in the streets like we used to 'cause they got cameras almost everywhere now.

You'll get a ticket from the cameras now.

Yeah, and we had the original '84 elbows back then. The original. There wasn't no 22s and 20s and all that. Nah, there wasn't none of that.

So what were people driving back then? What were you driving?

I had a little Sable. A two-door coupe and a Sable, white with a blue top, blue inside, blue elbows. Before that I had a Nova with elbows and vogues on it. We went from… back in the day we used to take the springs off our cars during the MacGregor Park days, and we'd come down there just bouncin' up and down 'cause we took the springs off. We just come through bouncin' up and down and we had them LOC glasses on and put it on 97 Rock. We used to call them glasses "amp glasses" durin' the MacGregor Park days. They real, real dark. It's what them old people wear for cataracts when they can't see. That's what we used to wear. That was the style right there.

Why did people start wearing those?

We wore 'em for the glare, and we was cool! We would ride around, smoke our weed and drink our liquor. There wasn't no syrup back then. This was before the syrup days.

(2010)

Russell Washington

RECORD LABEL/STORE OWNER
SOUTH PARK

Founder of Bigtyme Recordz, located since the late 1980s at King's Flea Market in South Park. His first signing to the label was UGK, and he went on to release records by Point Blank, PSK-13, 20-2-Life, and some of DJ Screw's only label releases.

Did you open the shop before you started the label?

I opened the shop when I was 19-years-old.

What was King's [Flea Market] like back then? The same sort of gathering area that it is now, with everybody coming in?

Oh, back then it was the wild wild west. I mean, now, back then it was like ... incredible. Back then there might have been four or five times the traffic. It was a hot commodity. When we did the UGK record, we sold like 4,000 copies out of my shop in a *month.* You know, it was like ... that's a lot of copies of a cassette for a small record label. Man, it was unbelievable. Now, you know, I think they just don't market the Flea Market like they used to.

So they marketed it back then? Did they do radio commercials and that kind of stuff?

Haha, no. It was a lot more ... it was a different time, man. You know, you had a lot more street money, you had a lot more people workin', it was just ... man, people used to just come in there ... you know, it was nothing for somebody to walk in and spend $300 on CDs. Now you won't see $200–$300 in a *day.* Occasionally, you'll get maybe one wholesale customer come and spend that amount, but most of the customers now ... you've got a whole generation of people that's conditioned themselves *not* to buy music out of stores. They either look for it free on the web and buy a song from iTunes ... check a guy on the street—three, four, five discs for $10, something like that.

Yeah. Or guys out hustling, popping trunks and selling CDs that way.

Yeah! I mean, you know, it became a ... it's sad to say it'll probably be a while before it recycles to what it used to be.

Well, it becomes kind of a boutique thing, where a lot of people seek that out. Because a lot of old school people—like me and I'm sure like you—you like to have the record. You want to have it and be able to look at the artwork and actually have the physical record.

Yeah. I wanna reintroduce tracks, adjust the publishing company and things like that, and the new generation … they just wanna listen to a couple of songs, see if they like it or, you know … do what they do with it. Put it on the phone … 1,000 songs for free on the iPod. That's just the nature of our game now.

When you started out, were you just doing tapes, did you start off with tapes, or records?

I started with tapes and records.

Because you started before CDs even existed, really.

Yeah, I was there for like the beginning, when they started coming and they was in those … what they call those …

Those longboxes.

Longboxes, yeah. All that paper wastin', you know … but I like those boxes. Those would have been a great piece these days.

Well they were cool because it just gave you more artwork …

Yeah, it was cool back then. Them are the days I miss, especially the checks. Seems we gotta live with iTunes. It's no great thing for me to get a third less on a record, wholesale, but then sell it for retail. I'm not excited about that, you know. I can't project when it comes, but it's really … when you think about that you sell thousands and thousands of record on iTunes, and, you know, they sellin' for $6.99, $5.99, whatever … and you can get more than that on wholesale, sellin' it yourself, but … you know, that's the medium everybody's using right now, so we have to take it.

Right. How much … did you ever depend really heavily on Southwest?

Uh … *very* heavily! [*laughs*] I mean … not as far as runnin' Bigtyme, but just … it was great to have a place that you could go and trust that … it's your one stop, and then that stuff is taken care of. I hated to see them go because the expansion they was makin' I think in the long run woulda been great, you know, as far as their distribution. I just think they took some shots that they shouldn't have took. And I think it added to the downfall, because … the things they never gave to the locals and the locals addressed that … ultimately just didn't work out like it should have.

Yeah, because it was really … I mean, they were really reaching some people there for a while. I know that middle-range guys, not even top guys … Point Blank told me he used to go over there and get five-figure checks all the time. A couple times a month.

Yeah. I mean, when he did the project that was good, you know … *3 'N The Mornin'*, we shipped out just under 59,000 in the first day. And it definitely rose from the humble beginnings of me with UGK, with them taking a 100 CDs. So, it was a *definite* kind of … weird feelin' for me. I just felt like it was losing a part of your family. You know, I was over there … what, 1992 to 2003 it closed I think?

Yeah, 2003.

11 years with them, and I had some good times, you know? They had me under some bad times, and we definitely rose to some good times together.

So how did it change your business plan? What did you have to do at that point?

Basically, you was lookin' at a guy in my case … I was like the *don*, period, when they closed. And I actually gave it a shot a couple months out … I had got heavy into like doing my own little sales and kind of wholesales and I was trying that, but I think the big problem that hurt me was just … I held on to too much of the staff, you know? My income had dropped—severely—but I still was employing about seven people all the way up to like 2005 or '6. You know, I just went too many years holdin' on to some of the staff. I always felt like it was gonna change a little bit, but, you know … it didn't.

Well the thing was that Southwest crashed in 2003, and then a couple of years later was when record sales really started dropping off … there was no way of knowing that was going to happen the way it did, where people just stopped buying records.

And the big thing, too, is that generation basically made DJs more powerful than they should be. You know, I've always been a fan of DJs, but there's not too much originality to a DJ no more, and especially the modern DJ. What do they do? They download songs on their computer and they play records at a club. I mean, okay… half of them don't scratch, they're not… you know… you buy your Mac and you play records!

Copy and paste out of your iTunes.

Yeah, and then just get some little fake turntables that scratch, and you do that and you're a DJ now. But they all do mixtapes, and then when everybody does mixtapes, who wants a real record when I can get 10 or 15 of the major hits on one CD? And it's everywhere now. There's more DJs than artists… or mixologists… whatever they call it. I just think it's a bad thing, because I feel like a lot of people who … you got people who probably would *never* in their lifetime see $1 million that was makin' $1 million from the music business. And that's all been wiped out. I mean, even in Houston—when was the last "next star" we've heard from in Houston to blow up? In how long? A new guy—not an old guy getting a little resurgence, but somebody new? It's been long time.

It's been a long time.

It's been a *real* long time, and you know, back in the day, we used to hear about the next great guy I mean… weeks before that guy was like… you know… the only mixer I think that was really makin' an impact was Screw. The guys that rapped on a Screw tape, many of them, they at least got to do one or two records. Now, it's not happening that way. Everything's just flooded. It's just flooded out, and I think guys… guys giving away 30 burned CDs for 10, 15 bucks and I'm like, "What are you *doing*?" That's just too much music. All these sites just give it away free. It's just terrible.

Talking about Screw, and back when he was selling lots and lots of tapes—when you guys came together, that was his first real release, right?

No. Uh-uh. He did *Bigtyme Vol. 2, All Screwed Up* for us. That was… they got that history wrong. Everybody say, "Oh Screw was sellin' a *bunch* of tapes in his house before he met Bigtyme." No way, *José*. Screw didn't even have a *car* when he met Bigtyme. He was sellin' *some* tapes, but in between that '95 to '96, '97, he started sellin' a *lot* of tapes, and that's based on Bigtyme, because we put… you know, *3 'N The Mornin'* was incredible records. One of the best records of the South.

Fantastic.

You think about *All Screwed Up*—65,000 [units] on that compilation, which was all Bigtyme people. I went to Screw, I said, "Hey, it's a down period. I wanna do the least expensive record I can do. I been hearin' about you, you know, your Screw tapes. People like you on the streets. I want you to Screw an album." He said "Bet." His manager at the time said "Give him $400." I pulled that right out and gave him $400. I think I gave him like two percent on the record or something. You know, I was looking for a record to do maybe 2,000 or 3,000, something… the record, it started off with a little slow movement, but that record went on to sell 65,000 units. I asked him, I said, "Hey, I want you to do one that's yours. All you." And that's when we started the *3 'N The Mornin'* thing. But in that process of doin' *3 'N The Mornin'*, we ran *Rap Pages* ads, we ran *Murder Dog* ads, we probably put out… I don't know, maybe 200,000 or 300,00 black and yellow flyers. We had posters—"DJ Screw"—and then for people just to write it out and say, "Oh, man. He just was sellin' tapes out of his house and it just blew up." They left out a very big point: That for almost two years, six people worked day and night for this man. I have no doubt he woulda been pretty much the same thing or even more with the right atmosphere, but to say that Bigtyme didn't work as a major force in the sellin' of that record is ridiculous. Or those… even the tapes at his house, because if there's no Bigtyme, they don't know about Screw *all* over where they knew about him. We put him everywhere. You know, he's in *Rap Page* ads, he's in *Murder Dog* ads, you know? That's… from your first record, I think 2 or 3,000 goin' out 'til your next record. 58,000—something going out? That is a huge, huge thing, and that's a big step. Major label artists might not even make a jump like that. When you're a dude that don't rap, or do nothing and they're giving you $5,000 to do a show? There's a lot of things, but it was ... it was a great thing because he had a lot of people supporting him, and they just always believed in him, and I'm not that guy that ... I don't make no big deal about it, but I know for a fact what we did.

Did both parts come out at the same time?

What parts? Of *3 'N The Mornin'*?

Yeah, because you had the West Coast version and you had the Houston version. Did they both come out at the same time?

No, we actually ... the *3 'N The Mornin' 1* and *2* was actually gonna be the record, and at the time when we submitted, we did the one sheets and submitted it, we had got probably a 100,000 orders. But what happened was, we hadn't cleared all the samples and the licensing of the songs. After meeting with the legal team, it was just unfeasible to try and do it without clearing it, and it was unfeasible to try and clear it, being such a small company. So, we started workin' and we actually did the whole license deal with all Houston people. And the only reason the other one came out is because the Soundwaves guy made us an offer we couldn't refuse, so we released ... we basically just pressed up enough for him.

Oh just kind of like on the underground level?

Yeah, the guy from Soundwaves blew us up about it and we basically just sold it to him and he distributed it a little bit and then he kind of sold it through the mail, but it was never ... those two records were never distributed. We just like ... you could call and order it.

What was it like working with Screw on the creative end?

I think Screw was an artist that didn't get to see what he was truly supposed to be. Just what he could have been. I mean, he had just got in to tryin' to play, you know, the keys a little bit, maybe do some rappin' ... I mean ... I think Screw was definitely a turntable genius, because to make beats from clips and pieces of songs, and to make something that you could *listen* to and be hypnotic like that ... *damn* he was good. Screw had people who don't even like music—Screw music—like *3 'N The Mornin'*. I don't know what they said about the best Houston records. I think we was number ... I forgot the number, but at least we got acknowledged, for bein' on there, because it was definitely one of the best Houston records.

Especially with the way that mix flows, it's got a nice sort of patchwork to it. It wasn't just a mixtape. That's why 3 'N The Mornin' *is such a good introduction for people.*

Yeah, and I mean even ... I think even his ability to take a vocal track, and find that right beat that make that track just all the way different. I mean, even with like with "My Mind Went Blank," and they come in with Aaliyah or whatever ... he mixed it with ... changed the whole focus of that song. It was on *All Screwed Up*. I mean, man, he definitely had a ... I think if he'd had just been a little bit more ... better on the business side, he would have definitely had a big, big career. If he was really pushing for that.

Well, it's amazing considering the framework around him and such, that he did as well as he did. It all kind of snuck up on him, you know?

Yeah, I think that, too. And then, people complainin' ... you know, you are ... to me, sometimes life can take you. I mean the life just was ... music was different for a lot of people. You know, you hear that story over and over again. They get in music and your whole life change. I mean, it's like me. I had my shop, so I had tasted the experience of makin' money and then to go—within two months I'm signing my first group to a major label contract, a pretty decent one. But I also got the experience of the ... [*laughs*] the bitter side of it, at a real early point in my career.

So you started the store first. How long did you have the store open before you started releasing tapes?

A couple of years. I had it open a couple of years, and I actually had like two stores, and one of them had sales real bad, and I just basically was payin' off my debts, and then after I got those taken care of, I hung up a sign that said *Would like to produce a rap record.* And the first person that came was Pimp C. I consider myself one of the luckiest producers of the '90s.

They just happened to come into King's?

Yeah. They had been in King's before, but then when he saw the sign looking for a record, they came and brought me a demo. They were the *first* demo that I got. It was UGK's demo, and when I heard it I was real nervous. The second demo I got was the Sex Fiends, but they wasn't called the Sex Fiends then. They was Twice As Nice, and I was workin' with them and UGK at the same time. And after starting, you know, I realized that was a little too much for me to take on, and I... me and my wife at the time said, "These boys are the best," so we went with them. I think Pimp C was a musical genius, too.

Yeah. He really was.

He started doin' that recordin', tryin' to get that record done in '91... then, February of '92, we dropped the EP, and I think it was out two weeks and we got a contract offer from Nastymix. I remember that, thinkin' it was like... I forgot if it was like $15,000 to sign with them... and I was like, "I think we gonna make that." We hadn't even really started doin'... but they saw something, and within two weeks, we hadn't even sold a lot of records. In that first two weeks, records would *count.* We were sellin' some in my store. I don't think anybody even ordered one in the first two weeks. But I think that was back in the day when all the record companies had interest in the city, and somebody must've gave 'em a tape and they was like, "Yeah, they faxed a contract." I remember just sittin' there when that contract came over the fax, and I was like, "What the heck?" And I actually was a big Nastymix fan because I was in love with Sir Mix-A-Lot... I knew a lot of the records because I *sold* the records.

Right, right. I guess you knew just about everything back then.

Yeah, I was really on top of my music [*laughs*]. But the only thing is with UGK, I wish I woulda got along... and I mean, before Pimp passed, we actually was... I think we was... I think me and Pimp would actually have mended our relationship a lot more if he wouldn't have passed, because we had a lot of communication goin' on before he passed.

He was really changed, don't you think, after coming out of prison?

Oh yeah, man. He was a different person. I think he was a little... kinda a little bit more tempermental at first, but me and him... from a conversation we had, it was like I could feel like he was a changed person. As far as what he was doin'... the conversation we was havin', and I had gave him a lot of words because when he passed, they had Chris Young mix his song, and I was like, "That's the last record I'ma do. That's the record I wanna make my last. That's how I came in, that's how I wanna leave." I was just like, "He gonna do it, he gonna do it." But, you know... he just passed, and it was really upsetting.

[Regarding Screw...] A few people know, I just... I look at so many videos and I listen to people tell these stories, and I'm like, "Where were you? I don't remember that story from back in the day." I would just love to see what could have came of Screw if he would have lived, and been able to really handle his business the way it should have been.

Well he wanted to produce, and I think he would have done really, really interesting production if he would have continued.

Yeah, man. You think about it, too... if Screw put something behind you, there was gonna be some fire to it. Every time. He definitely had an ear. Them Screw tapes, some of them Screw tapes, he could work magic right there. I think he was definitely sellin' tapes, but there was definitely—in between that '95, late '96, there had to be a drastic—there was a drastic change in his life, just period. I remember that first car was a 4-door kind of car he bought *after* he got paid from Bigtyme, and then I remember him gettin' an Impala after he got paid from *3 'N The Mornin',* and I was at his house when he was doin' that, and there was some people comin' for tapes. I remember it being a *mad house* after *3 'N The Mornin'*, but he didn't do anything to promote those tapes. Those tapes was ... some of those tapes *got* to have sold into the millions. Between all the people who bootlegged 'em, how many times ... I mean, where is *June 27* as it stands? That's gotta be two million records!

That's gotta be.

It's gotta be. You can put on those old tapes right now, and people know those songs word for word off of freestyle mixes. They know them word for word. It was a lot of people that showed a lot of interest in that from the Screwed Up Click.

And they still are. Well, I guess the shop isn't open right now, but they still press them, they still buy 'em.

Yeah. They're gonna continue to buy 'em. If you hear about Screw all the time, you got people who want to buy, and then with them being chapters, everybody—people that are into the records and true fans, they wanna collect them all. But you got a lot of people tryin' to do a little shady stuff with puttin' 88 or 100 tapes on one disc or DVD or whatever it is. But I don't know—the shop opened back up? Somebody told me they opened back up in a smoke shop or something.

They were gonna. I talked to Big Bubb when I was down there a few weeks ago ... and he said that they weren't open yet, but that they were supposed to open up off of 288 somewhere.

That's what I heard, too, but then somebody said it was going to be a smoke shop somewhere up and down Cullen. I was like, "Where?" I didn't get the full story but they said that's what they heard. But they need to come back! They definitely ... people want 'em.

You never saw that shop full, but people were always coming in there buying records.

Every time I would pass by, I'd be like, "Oh yeah, they're still doing it." Some days there would be a lot of people out there.

Some days there would be people out partying in the parking lot. It was consistent. I go there and to your store every time I'm in Houston to buy records. Actually, I come to your shop to buy tapes, because you always have tapes out.

Yeah, I'm actually gettin' up in the morning and going to the garage and bringing over some tapes. One day I hope to have my garage cleared out of tapes. I put them up there and believe it or not, every week we'll sell a few. People go through there, especially all the old school stuff, they definitely go in there and buy that stuff.

So you still got some 3 'N The Mornin' *tapes?*

Yeah! I got *3 'N The Mornin' I, II* and *III* remixes. I just ... the problem is they're just not organized in the garage, so ... me going in the garage is like a once every blue moon thing. My garage is full to the brim. You can't even walk in there.

(2011)

Rick Royal

RAPPER, PRODUCER · NORTHSIDE

Known as "Gangsta Ric" even before he came to Houston in the early 1980s, Rick landed on the city's Northeast side near Greenspoint and soon pulled together a group of young high school rappers who would become known as Royal Flush. The group was one of Houston's first rap groups and became the dominant voice in its early battle rap scene at the Rhinestone Wrangler. After that scene ran its course, Royal Flush went on to release a single and two albums on Rap-A-Lot, and have been noted as influential by many Houston old schoolers, including Bun B. "I Never Made 20" is Rick's best-known work with Royal Flush. He still produces, and hosts a radio show in Dallas.

When did you come to Houston for the first time? Did you come from the East Coast or from the West Coast? I know you lived on both.

I came to H-Town in '80, '81, and did the eighth grade ... and then my mama moved me back to the East Coast, to New Jersey. That's where I was born at. Shit, she moved me back to the East Coast, I did the ninth grade there, then I came back to Texas. And I came back to Texas to stay.

And you went to Aldine.

Yeah. I went to Hogg Middle School at first. In Studewood. Then we moved to the Third Ward area, and then I moved back to the East Coast, but when I came back, my mama had moved from the Third Ward area to the Aldine area. Greenspoint. What they call Greenspoint now. It's called Greenspoint now, but when I moved there, it was real, real nice and shit. It was like a suburban area. We turned that shit out. Between me and my niggas, by the time we got finished with Greenspoint, that shit was called *Gunspoint.*

What happened? What do you think was the biggest change there?

We changed it by some of the activities we was involved in! We started, you know, we started fuckin' around sellin' drugs and carjackin' and all that kind of shit. Doin' some boostin'. Boostin' clothes outta Greenspoint Mall ... We were selling drugs in Greenspoint and The Villages of Greenbriar. That was our stomping grounds—Villages of Greenbriar. Off of Imperial and Greens Road?

Greens Road is just north of the mall, right?

Yeah, but I'm talkin' about ... Villages of Greenbriar was where a lot of us lived at, and those apartments—it's a real big ass apartment. As a matter of fact, it almost takes up half of Imperial. In between Imperial and Seminar ... in between Greens Road and Seminar. Real big apartments. Big enough for us to congregate and get together and cause havoc on the rest of Greenspoint, 'cause there was a *lot* of us. When I first moved there, there wasn't no black people lived in Greenspoint.

At that point, was music a part of your life? Were you listening to music—were you into stuff?

Hell yeah! From day one, brother. Day one I been fuckin' with music in terms of either listenin' to music heavy or bein' in a dance group. I started off in dance groups when I was young, playing drums and shit. I played drums, led the choir when I was about 8-years-old, and then they put me on drums because I asked too many questions about other shit. I guess they didn't like that. They took my ass out the front of the choir and put me in the *back* of that bitch. I ain't even know how to play no drums! They ain't want me talkin' at all. I asked the preacher, I said, "If Adam and Eve was the first two people here, how did the rest of us get here? After they had Cain and Abel, and Cain killed Abel, there was only three people left. How'd the rest of us get here?" And that motherfucker ain't had no answer for me. Nobody ever had an answer for me—although there *is* an answer. Nobody wants to admit that shit. Cain and Abraham was fuckin' Eve! And made a bunch of kids. Wasn't no rules! Wasn't nothin' wrong with it. It's just a good feelin' goin' on! Know what I'm talking about?

Was no Bible.

And the Bible was written by *men*, so how can you really believe everything? I'm just more realistic about shit than a lot of other people are. And I'm logical. You gotta make some logical shit for me. You can't just tell me some cartoon, clownin' ass shit. Not gonna get it.

So you were already playing instruments early on.

Yeah, I started playing drums at 8, but I wouldn't consider myself a musician on the drums because I didn't know how to play. I'm hittin' the tom and the snare, but I didn't fuck with that foot pedal. I ain't know how to do that shit! But I actually taught myself how to play drums later on in life.

Like on a full kit?

Yeah, like you sit in front of a drum set. And same thing with the bass guitar. I ain't gonna say I'm a bass guitar *player*, but I taught myself how to play. I've always been good at that type shit, like anything I see that wanna fuck with, I jump on it and I get it. Except for rap, believe it or not. Rap was one of my most difficult things to learn how to do.

Why was that?

Because I didn't know what the fuck I was doing. I used to be the drummer for my brother's rap group. My brother had a rap group—him and my cousins and a neighbor. And I said, "Shit, I wanna learn how to rap! I wanna do me a rap." So I did this rap, I came up with this rap: "Like the Pittsburgh Steelers without Bradshaw / like 7-Up without the crazy straw / like water without the fall…" But when I went to say the rap to the *group*, my fuckin' mouth… I was like, "Like Terry Bradshaw without the straw / like a crazy straw without the straw / like a *straw* without Terry Bradshaw." And them niggas was like, "Nigga, get the fuck out of here!" And my brother—he the leader of the group—he stuttered and shit! This nigga like, "Ain't w… w… w… ain't we tell you to play the drums?!" Ain't that a bitch? And I promise you my niggas, when I tell you, that that was the beginning of gangsta rap, because I went and wrote a rap. I said, "Fuck me tryin' to put a rap in my head," just come off my head with it. I went and sat down and *intricately* put together a rap in my head, and I talked about every last one of them.

The ones in the band?

I went down the line, like, "Fuck you, Rob / your head looks like a doorknob / fuck you Trent / you ain't about shit / fuck you John / you ain't got it goin' on / and if *any* one of y'all niggas don't like this rap / after I finish, we can all go scrap / as a matter of fact, I'll bust y'all niggas in the list / with my motherfuckin' fist / and after I get done / y'all can kiss my dick / matter of fact, nigga—I quit!"

How old were you then?

Shit… like 10! I was like 10-years-old, and I slammed my motherfuckin' drumsticks down and left the room. Like, "Fuck y'all." That's how gangsta rap got started, because I never ever changed the way that I rapped. Like, that's how I started, and I never ever changed my concept, my subject matter, my attitude about it, and at the same time, since all them niggas shitted on me, I became a rap terrorist. I started hatin' rappers.

That's what made you a battle rapper.

Well that's what made me a *vicious* battle rapper. Battle rappin'... back in the day, they would be battle rappin', they did all that MC shit. See, I never was a MC rapper. I didn't rap hip-hop. I wouldn't talk about my microphone, my flow, the DJ, the beat, the track... my rhyme's got this, my flow got that... none of that shit! Everything was about fightin', fuckin', fightin' some more, gettin' girls... talkin' about niggas real bad, but *real* shit about them, too. Wasn't nothin' funny about it. It was on some like real shit. I was really a terrorist, and I brought that style of rap to H-Town.

So how old were you when you started hustling?

Hmm... technically, 11.

Wow...

Because... put it like this—I used to serve fiends in my daddy's trap. My daddy and my stepmama had a trap, in Atlantic City, New Jersey. The fiends would come to the crib, I'd go upstairs and let 'em know who down there, he tell me... they give me what I need to give 'em, and the fiends... the custos would give me the money, I'd take it back up to pops, and that would be it. And then one day, my stepmother... she began to give me money for it. She broke it down to me, "Since you really helpin' us out..." 'Cause they don't have to come down them long ass steps to serve 'em. *I* served 'em. So I would get $20 off every $100.

That's a lot of money at that age.

Hell yeah nigga! I went to buy me some damn... motherfuckin' silver... silver was real cheap at that time. Buy me some silver... necklace... with dice on it and shit. Some rings and shit... four finger ring... get me a big nameplate, hang that shit around my neck... get me some motherfuckin' wristbands, headbands... nice little Adidas sweatsuit, some Adidas shoes and shit. Yeah. I was ready, and all that came from sellin' drugs and livin' in a trap. I was *livin'* in the trap with my people.

So that was in Jersey. You came back to Houston after that.

Yeah, I came back to Houston really for... that was in Jersey before I actually moved to California. I moved to California after that. I was like 10, 11... I take that back. I was 10 when I was doin' that shit, because when I moved to California, I was in between 10 and 11. Moved to Los Angeles, California right into the bloodiest motherfuckin' neighborhood on the planet. Called The Jungle. Right next to Baldwin Hills. Baldwin Hills is a rich black neighborhood in L.A., but on the other side of the street is The Jungle. You seen the movie *Training Day*?

Yeah.

The Blood neighborhood? That's the neighborhood I was raised in.

And so you were there how long—a year or two?

Nah—three? But my most important years. My developing years. I'd say from 10, 11 to 13. So almost four years, but shoot—I became a little man in that motherfucker, too. If you know anything about Los Angeles, and the neighborhood life, your ass grow up quick. And I grew up *real* fast, bro. When I say I grew up fast, I grew up *fast.* I mean, I had done things in Atlantic City... I was always a hood nigga. I ain't gonna sit here and act like I was just some goody two-shoes, good little dude. I was always a hood nigga. They called me "Rick Royal" in the projects in Atlantic City, and called me "Slick Rick" in school and shit like that, but when I got to L.A., they started callin' me "*Gangsta* Ric." And that's the name they *gave* me. It wasn't even a nickname. It was a *label.* Which ain't cool, because if you think about it, you know, you label somebody, my nigga, it's almost like you tellin' them what they gonna be when they grow up. I almost was left without a shot, without a chance to be anything else. At least, as far as my psyche was concerned, I was already feelin' like, you know, "This is what it is." But at the same time, my mama ain't like that shit. She saw people start callin' me Gangsta Ric, and then... my mom had converted to Islam, so most of my family in California was Muslims. But me, personally, I was torn. Between Islam and gangbangin'. So, really … and I gave up Islam—about the third week into it? I wasn't with that shit no more. When they finally made me realize there wasn't no Christmas—we don't celebrate Christmas as Muslims? Oh, I quit the Muslims!

That was it.

I wasn't with that shit no more! I was like, "Hell nah! They call me Kareem—y'all can call me whatever y'all want to. I'm in the Bloods now, 'cause ain't no Christmas!" You mean to tell me I'm comin' outside on Christmas, my niggas … kids got new bikes, new sneakers and shit … new clothes, new toys and shit, and I'm just this motherfucker waitin' on Kwanzaa, and then we ain't even gonna get no toys on Kwanzaa? Nah, fuck the Muslims. I mean, no disrespect, know what I'm sayin'? I mean, I ain't ridin' on 'em like that, I'm just sayin' I didn't wanna be a Muslim no more. I was a kid! You can't take Christmas away from a 10, 11-year-old kid. I been waitin' on Christmas, you waitin' on Christmas all year long … if there's not anything you're going to be happy about this year—if you have a fucked up birthday, then you know Christmas gonna be good.

So when you went to Houston, you kind of had this persona already.

When I got to Houston, my nigga, I was a gangbangin', bloody ass little thug, criminal-minded killer. And that's real talk. My juvenile record is worse than a lot of niggas' shit in they whole life. I'm talkin' about I been arrested for attempted murder *twice* in L.A., gang allegation charges, shit like that. Expelled from school for tryin' to kill a nigga. Tryin' to kill a nigga named Charles Lockett. And this was my boy, too, but when I was on my way to school one morning … let me put it like this: I was *cool* with Charles Lockett. I ain't have no problem with Charles Lockett, but when I was on my way to school one morning, at Audubon Junior High School in L.A. … I'm on my way to school one day and I see my Blood brothers runnin' down the street away from our school. I'm like, "What's goin' on?" They're like, "Kareem, catch him!" They was runnin' after Charles Lockett. At that point … if my niggas chasin' you … if they chasin' you, you did somethin'. Without a hesitation, I whipped out my switchblade, which was a *big* ass switchblade. I had like a seven, eight, nine-inch switchblade in my back pocket. And when I tell you, man, I swung this knife at this nigga, at his abdominal area, like his ribcage or whatever … I might have killed him if I'd hit him. I should have known right then and there he was goin' to the pros in football. Because I missed him! He jumped back, and I missed him, so I got his shirt. And that was probably the best moment of his life *and* my life, 'cause I'd have went straight to jail for murder. The way I swung at him—I swung with all my might. I don't know if you've ever seen somebody do this shit—swing at a baseball, miss it and turn all the way around?

Fall down …

I ain't fall, but you know what I'm talkin' about—swing to hit the ball, miss it, and your whole body turns around because you swung so hard. That's how hard I swung the knife at him, but I missed him, 'cause he jumped back. He jumped away from it, and got away. And then he ran back to the school, and went and got the dean and security. And they came out and met me in front of the school. I had threw the knife down up under my foot and put some … I think it was some Newports or some Kools … a cigarette pack on top of it in a little paper bag. And they was like, "Where the gun at? Where the knife at?" I said, "I don't know what y'all talkin' about." Because I couldn't believe he went in the school and told on me. I didn't even know snitchin' was a part of the game. And they grabbed the knife, arrested me, expelled me … after that I was out to get kicked out of every damn junior high school in—I went on a junior high school *tour* in L.A. I went to Jefferson Junior High School, I went to Mount Vernon … and Mount Vernon was where I first saw a group called Royal Flush. Which—I stole they name when I got to Texas. It was a pop-lock group. And they name was Royal Flush. They had Playboy bunnies on the back of they jackets. With some blue like khaki jackets. In L.A., we used to call anything with that twill material... khaki supposed to be a color. We ain't give a shit. All that shit was khaki to us. Fuck the color. If you got some Dickies, they're khaki. That's a real L.A. nigga for you there, that understands that terminology. So I was in the Valley, tryin' to shoot at Crip niggas and shit, 'cause these shot-callers, they give you assignments to do. So we skipped school, we'd all get on the bus ridin' on what they call the RTZ all the way out to the Valley, and as soon as I whipped the gun out, and started bustin' at these niggas, out of nowhere, undercover cops just ran and *swarmed* our ass. I'm talkin' about the dudes must have been *waitin'* on us or some shit. I don't know who put together this damn plan, but they let these niggas know we was comin'. Because them niggas was *waitin'* on us. We seen the Crip niggas by the gate at this school, like behind a fence. We started hittin' them niggas up, so I pulled a gun out, and the cops started chasin' us, and here I am with my first real, real serious—I been chased by cops before in Atlantic City, but not like this. I'm runnin' with a gun in my hand. And I threw the gun—I was fast as fuck, though. I threw the gun—I was runnin' in a mountain area. I threw the gun *way* down the other side of that fuckin' mountain. But that cop—I'll never forget that shit. This some real shit, Lance—this fucked me up for the rest of my life—that cop *never stopped chasin' me*, my nigga. I'm fast! *Dogs* stop chasin' me. This motherfucker was on his *mission*, man! Like this motherfucker was really runnin' after me! And that nigga caught me, too. Nigga ended up catchin' me after I took his ass on a long ass ride. He caught me—I remember that nigga put his foot on my face and I was on the ground—that's how he caught me, because I tripped over all these rocks and shit. And this motherfucker put his foot all on my face and shit—my face was right next to some shit. Some hard-ass shit. Like a dog or somebody had came and shitted out there. A mountain lion, I don't know. I kept tellin' him, "Man, get my face away from this shit!" That nigga ain't give a fuck. He kept puttin' his foot on my face, tellin' me, "Shut up. Shut up." I'm like, "That's some mean ass shit right there!" Literally!

So it scarred you as far as your interactions with the cops.

You know, that just let me know them niggas is really about they business. Like, "Motherfucker, you supposed to *been* stopped chasin' *me*." I guess he could see me, because I ran in this big mountain area with all these big ass hills and shit. But them niggas ain't find that *gun*, though!

They didn't?

Hell no them niggas ain't find that gun.

So you went to jail?

Hell yeah. My mama came and got me, my mama and my uncle came and got me. My uncle was cool. I had an uncle named Ricky. He was cool until that day. I guess he was mad 'cause my mama had to come get me. And the whole time we on the elevator... let me tell you something, too, bro... I don't give a fuck about no damn cops, I don't give a fuck about no jail. Just don't let my *mama* get here. Please, lock me up! Put me *some*where! I'm *down* for the jail bid—don't let my *mama* get to me, 'cause she gonna fuck me *up*! I was more scared of my mama than I *ever* would be about a cop.

What was the biggest thing that changed for you when you got to Houston?

Well, I gotta admit, man—Houston changed me because Houston had an identity at that time. And niggas had some pride about theyself. Niggas wasn't fittin' to let nobody come in that motherfucker and turn they ass out. You best believe I came from L.A. with that Blood shit. I'm at Hogg Middle School, the whole school red, so I'm thinkin', you know—*we already here*! I'm good! I'm ready to get it in! And these niggas was like, "We don't know what you talkin' about—*Blood?* We don't do that shit around here." And everybody in Texas was sayin' *cuz* and *dawg*. That's L.A. gang words. You say *dawg*, you a blood. You say *cuz*, you a Crip. So, that wasn't no big deal to niggas. Niggas wasn't tryin' to hear that gangbangin' shit. I was an outcast. I was an *alien* to these niggas. They wasn't hearin' that shit. "We playas and hustlas. We ain't on that motherfuckin' gangbangin' shit." I respected Houston for that shit, too. Because

I couldn't get niggas in the Bloods and shit at that point. So that changed me a whole lot. I always was athletic. Always into sports. I played football my whole life. My dream in life was to go to the NFL. That was my first love, and realistically, technically, really still *is* my first love—football. So I concentrated on football.

And you started Royal Flush in high school?

Well, I didn't start it—what it was was that all the rappers at Aldine decided to make a group. And I always felt like they did that shit to stop *me* from terrorizin' everybody. 'Cause I was on some battle rap shit. So I guess they figured if we be a group, I guess we can all get along.

Do you remember what year that was?

Shit... I got to Aldine like '82. That was my freshman year, '82. It was me, a dude named Class C, Tricky T—that's Tim Johnson, Donald Stewart—he was Cowboy. 'Cause that nigga had that voice. He sounded like Cowboy from the Furious Five. And a guy named Ernest Polk—his name was Sergio. A whole lot of dudes in the group. The Royal Flush group was really a gang that had rappers in it. James Miller, Mac White, Spud... a nigga named Earl. We had so many members in Royal Flush... and anybody from Willow Run neighborhood, Acres Homes... Greenspoint, the Aldine area... all them niggas... if you knew us, you was just a part of Royal Flush. That's how we started off. There was a few niggas in the group that were rappers. At Aldine, we just used to be in rap contests all the time, tearin' niggas heads off. We'd go to different schools and... matter of fact, we used to *skip* school, and hear about a talent show at *another* school, and skip school, and go make they talent show and beat everybody ass.

Do you remember when you went to those talent shows—did you ever see anybody who later on became a real rapper?

Not really. Not at that point, but we used to come back to school, because of course, schools—we in the same district, so of course the schools would know. They had somebody waitin' for our ass when we got back. And we'd be on detention and shit. Everybody in one classroom—all the rappers in one classroom, in detention and shit the whole damn day. To rap, we would pull some extreme shit. The first time I ever boosted some clothes was because of rap. We needed some uniforms, so went to Montgomery Ward's—you remember Montgomery Ward's?

Of course.

We went to Montgomery Ward's, bro, and got these black and red sweatsuits and shit. So here's the plan: Everybody pick out they size and shit, go in the dressing room, put your shit on, and then put some clothes back on. Over the top of it. And in *some* cases, some niggas wasn't able to do that, so they had to put the sweatsuit over the top of they clothes. So everybody had they uniform, and there's about 10, 11, 12 of us... we give each other the nod, it's time to go. We walked out that door—this was before they put them tags on clothes—we all walked out of that motherfucker, went out the door... because Montgomery Ward's actually had an exit door that went out to the parkin' lot. We went out that motherfucker, the exit door, and I'm talkin' about we *sprintin'*. I'm talkin' about like we some Kenyans. In the Olympics and shit. We runnin' our ass off for a *long* time! Because we had to run back to Greenspoint, know what I'm talkin' about? I'm talkin' about *all* of us. Ain't one of us get caught. We all played football, ran track and played basketball. That motherfucker wasn't about to catch *us*. And then the next day, we went to Northline Mall and got our *names* put on the motherfuckers.

(2012)

DJ DMD

RAPPER, PRODUCER · PORT ARTHUR, TX

Rapper and producer DJ DMD split time between his hometown Port Arthur, Texas and Houston throughout the '90s. He is best known for his 1998 hit "25 Lighters," which featured Lil' Keke and Fat Pat and was remade by legendary Houston rock group ZZ Top in 2012. Even prior to the release of their version, he was working on a response track to his hit, called "25 Bibles," reflecting his conversion to Christianity in 2002.

You said you came to South Park in 1992. What was it like? What were your impressions of South Park as a community?

I mean, it was ghetto. Where we stayed in, we were with some street cats, and they put us up in an apartment—if I'm not mistaken we started out in Truxillo near U of H, and then we end off in some apartments ... you know, it was projects! Low-budget, roach-infested. But I didn't care. I was young, not long out of high school and I just wanted to make music. And I've always been the type of person where I could get along with just about anybody. That's one of the reasons that I was able to hang with street cats, and be around them and not be worried. I just loved making music, so no matter where I was gonna be, I was gonna be happy. As long as I'm doing music, I'm gonna be happy. But the people ... it was gritty. It took projects—the area, the community, the low ... the whole street side of town, street life of things—it was multiplied compared to what I had experienced in Port Arthur. It was a whole 'nother level coming to Houston. I got, I guess, a chance to experience that side of life, on that level. And in hindsight, of course, none of that stuff is good for anybody. I wouldn't condone it, I wouldn't encourage anybody to get involved in that lifestyle, but it was good people, just like there are good ghetto people in Port Arthur, good ghetto people all over the world. But the ghettoness was to another level, and the deepness of their *activity* was to another level. And, as I said, eventually led to their downfall. And unfortunately, their falls are harder than the falls of the guys in Port Arthur, so ... they on another level, you know what I mean? And that sent us back to Port Arthur. That's on the list of things, I guess, that my conscience was using when I made the decision in 2002 [to convert to Christianity], because I saw FBI agents bust open my door and they raided my record company's clique, *all at the same time.* So here I am with DEA agents with shotguns in the back of *my* head, thinkin' that I'm some part of somethin'. Dope rings. The *game* was another level! It's a bigger city, there's a whole bunch of other stuff to get involved into out here, and that's exactly what I remembered. The people were cool, but the street life was to another level. And when we went back to Port Arthur, one of the things that I … I didn't wanna be involved in that, that deep. Unfortunately, I wound up makin' the same mistakes, years later, and gettin' involved in that stuff, that deep, *again.*

Why do you think it's so easy for people to get dragged back into it?

For me, I was just chasing my music. Anybody who would help me finance my musical dreams … that's how I remained involved with people like that. And as you said, earlier in the game, that was really the only way that people in the ghetto could get records made—they have to link up with the dope boys, you know? They'd have to link up with the street cats to have the money to fund studio time, to fund manufacturing, to fund all this … 'cause we were little kids in the ghetto! We can't go to the bank and get a loan to finance, you know, the bank isn't gonna loan businesses for entertainment purposes right now at all. They didn't do it then, they're probably not doin' it now because it's such a speculative industry, but we couldn't find financing, so back then the only way that I could continue my dream was to yoke up with dope dealers. People who wanted to get out of the dope game, per se, but didn't have a legal way to do it—the music was the option that people used. You know, Master P, Cash Money … everybody started off in the street money. And the same thing was in Houston! That's how every label that got started back then. That's how every label got started unfortunately, with street money, with dirty money, and then they wound up finding a way to clean it up. That's why I was in it. Now, the cats who were in the street life, while they kept staying in the street life … well, unfortunately, they fell victim to the mentality that they had no other way. And when you around that for years and years and generations and that stuff get passed … you get to think that there *is* no other way. As big as America is and as opportunistic as this country is, you can be whatever you want to be if you put your mind to it, and there's a whole bunch of ways where you can do things legally. But these cats in the street, in the ghettos, they are bred like that, to just believe that they can't do nothing without doing it the wrong way. And that winds up trickling off into people's music and creativity, that whole mindframe that, "I gotta do the street life in order to be big …" and that's why they stay in it. Fortunately for me, I never grew up like that. I was a nerd, single mama. I didn't get involved with the street cats until I was into music in my 20s. So I grew up knowing that—*believing* that I could do anything I wanted to do. I went to college, I was a magna cum laude graduate … I didn't grow up like that. So when I would hang out with the street cats, it was, "Hey man, we doin' business—you using me to get out the streets, I'm using you to blow up my music career." But it wasn't about me bein' enraptured with the street life, per se. Not me. But a lot of the cats got involved—some of the hot rappers were actually dope boys who just wanted to get out of the street life using their skills. But problem is, once you start experiencing some success in the music business, they couldn't leave the street mentality alone. And I believe that's still going on a little bit today. They don't know how to separate, "I'm an artist now—I'm all about music now …" and "I'm involved in the street life, I've gotta do this …" Man, you can't—you gotta be one or the other. You gonna be a music man or you gonna be a dope man? One of the two, but you can't be both or you gonna split yourself up.

Part of it is that some of them have guys that they've been hanging with for 15 or 20 years and all of the sudden they blow up and the issue is them detaching themselves from that, and you see an effort on the part of some to do that … like when Screw moved to Mo City.

Yes, sir. And unfortunately, by the time Screw left he was already so deep with the whole drug stuff to where, you know, it had already played … it had already done damage to his body. And even though he got away, that stuff is serious to your body.

It's kind of irreversible.

And it's unfortunate that he had to be one of the ones … he was one of the ones that were … people now use as examples to get people away from that stuff. But that's part of the … I mean, he blew up so quick with no one really around him to teach him that you stick around too long with the old way of life and not change quick enough, and you're liable to go down like so many people have. And I'm thankful that I'm still here. I'm thankful.

In our last interview I asked you about some guys' faith in God and how some of them talk the talk but they're still acting bad, not walking the walk. You had some thoughts on that.

Well, as a born believer, having been walking with Jesus for eight years now, just my personal faith, and, well ... that's the faith that we're instructed to, according to scripture. I mean, I understand now why there are people like that out there in the world. I mean, the word of God itself talks about the different levels of growth. We are all growing at a different level, and even if you profess the name of Christ as your savior, you're on a journey as well. And, what I've learned is when people are walking—or talking, but not walking—that's either suggesting two things: either they're not really a believer, or number two, that they are just "baby believers," as the scripture defines them. And there's room for them to grow, and this could be a part of their growth process. A person has to understand ultimately that they are responsible for their own actions, and that it's up to them to get their words and their lifestyles to match up. At this point ... I don't know really, I can't remember exactly what I said last time, all I know is, I've grown to know that I should *definitely* not be judgmental towards anybody as far as how they portray their faith. You know, ultimately, we all have to stand in front of the Lord one day, and we all have to be accountable for what we've done and said in our bodies, especially after professing Jesus as Lord. So, if you *are* a person out there saying one thing, doing another thing, I just wanna encourage people to get close in the faith, learn what it means. There's power in your words and your life matching up. We paint a bad picture for Christ, for God the Father, when we say one thing and we do another thing. That only comes with growth ... trusting him and learning how powerful, how good he ... how much he has your back. And I've had to learn that maybe even in the last couple of months from talking to you. And I just wanna encourage people just to take your faith seriously. You can trust God, you can trust his word, and that's what I'm learning to do, so I'm very careful now of being too hard or judgmental on anybody in that particular walk. It does pain me to see someone saying one thing and doing another. It does pain me to see someone to say, "I love the Lord," and then got b's ["bitches"] and h's ["hos"] and negatively influencing other people. It pains me, but it doesn't surprise me anymore and it doesn't trip me out or offend me anymore, because that's what the Bible tells us. There are people like that in the world. So I just have compassion and understanding, and if I ever get a chance to minister to somebody who *is* in that predicament, it's just to encourage them to continue growing, growing, growing. Keep growing. And if they real, they will grow. If they won't, well, they'll be exposed later on, and the Bible has a whole lot to say about what happens to a person who's fakin' a front. I just want somebody to know that. You might could fool me, you might could fool Lance, but you can't fool the Almighty. You can't fool him.

Talk about UGK's relationship to Houston.

A lot of people know they're from Port Arthur, but of course they blew up and got ... people register them on the national or global scale with bein' from Houston. And that's always been fine with them. People in Port Arthur have never really had an issue with it, but they made a huge impact I guess more so in Houston than in any other part of the country. I been knowin' Chad since he was 9-years-old ... I mean—I'm sorry, ninth grade—in Lincoln High School. Bun graduated from the school that my wife graduated from, Thomas Jefferson in Port Arthur. So, I didn't really know Bun, but Chad and I had a real close relationship from the time he was 15 to the time he really broke out and started really hanging with Bigtyme and Russell and their career blew up. It was the summer that went down. Right before "Tell Me Something Good" blew up, we kinda had gone our separate ways because I was older, I was in college and [Pimp C] was still in high school. I remember the time he came back with the music from "Tell Me Something Good." He let us hear it in my bedroom, in a house full of people, and I remember listening—because we're talking about *Chad Butler* now, not Pimp C—and I remember that, "Man, what are you doing?" you know? Not knowing what was about to happen to this young man's life, "You pretty out there with these lyrics, you know?" At the time, N.W.A. was heavily influencing us. We both were starting to fall in love with Dr. Dre's production. I remember hearing it, not knowing, "Man, I don't know if the world is ready for this, coming from the South. I know N.W.A.'s having success in L.A., but I don't know if the South is ready for some…" some dirty mouth rappers, you know? Lo and behold, "Tell Me Something Good" hit the scene and the rest is history. I got to watch him transform the Houston scene, man. Before that, nobody was using the 808s he was using, and before Chad there wasn't anybody getting that soulful and singing on their songs—even gangsta stuff. Nobody was doin' that stuff, so it was amazing to see a cat that I grew up with bloom as a musician, do something on a national scale. And then for him to always represent Houston. He was always Pimp C behind the scenes and on stage or whatever, but he tried his very best to represent Port Arthur and Houston in a positive light every time he got a chance to—you know, nationally speaking. And Houston… I don't know if they ever really appreciated him… Houston owe a lot of success to Chad and them opening doors. If it wasn't for UGK, "25 Lighters" never would have had a chance. At the time, they weren't playing independent records on the radio. Rap-A-Lot was the biggest indie, but by that time, they were already blowing up. They were already *blown* up and their records were on the radio all the time… They didn't have no independent underground records playin' on the radio until "Tell Me Something Good" hit, and that was the first big record that really opened the door and made Houston radio pay attention to what was going on in the underground. And that's the real deal. "Tell Me Something Good," when it came on the radio, became 97.9 The Box's number one requested song of all time to that point. That blew it away. It forced them to have to pay attention to what was going on in the streets, what was going on in Screw's house, what they were already cooking in Screw's bedroom. It made them pay attention, so that by the time "25 Lighters" came, it was difficult compared to the majors, but it wasn't *as* difficult as it was pre-"Tell Me Something Good." For me to walk that record into the radio station, give my… "25 Lighters" came straight from the studio. The version that the song that it's known for wasn't even finished. I was able to take a demo of the mix of the song, bring it to the radio station, had some guys that were friends of mine and I just left it with them to get some opinions. On my way driving home from the radio station, it's on the radio. And by the end of the weekend, it was in full, heavy rotation. That's how supernatural that song was, but it wouldn't have been possible if not for the pioneering efforts of UGK, what they did for Houston music. And they represented South Park. Pimp and Bun B loved Screw and the whole North and Southside cliques to death. They never had beef with anybody… those boys was adored by Northside and Southside cliques. UGK was really instrumental in squashing the beef that we had in the city. You hear about the dirty mouths and the hard-hittin' bass, but they don't get props as beef squashers, and pioneers in the radio market. We never would have had a chance to get our records played on the radio had it not been for Chad and them doing what they did with their music.

(2011)

Cl'Che

RAPPER · SOUTH PARK

One of too few female voices on the scene, she emerged in the late '90s and has released multiple albums since, including a number of collaborative efforts. She has strong ties to the South Park Coalition and is known for her philanthropic endeavors around the city as founder of the women's organization S.H.E. Movement.

How different is [South Park] now from when you were growing up there?

I guess as far as like ... it's different as far as like how the *world* is different now. Because, I mean, like a lot of things that were happening that we could do back then in the neighborhood—in the world it's a lot different now. The crime rate now is more advanced. As the generations change, more things change in the neighborhood, and it changed for the worse than better. Just as the world changes, the neighborhood changes, and adapted the same way. The world, the neighborhood, we can say it's worse than before. Things that wasn't so bad back then, it's really bad—and tremendously bad—right now. So, the neighborhood where I'm from is just like the world today. Back then, it wasn't as bad, even though things happened back then, but now it's worse. Because we're losing a lot more people, the crime rate is more up, more businesses are failing and a lot of people are losing their homes. Things like that. So it's starting to change, with a different environment now.

You mean in the last few years?

Yeah, I could say even within the last two years, because since the recession, a lot of things changed on this earth *and* in the neighborhood. Because people are losing—like I said, people are losing their homes. That's makin' the crime rate go up because people don't *have*. A lot of younger children that are now kind of roaming the streets, or taking any vacant houses and running their dope houses out of ... even though these things were done back then, but they wasn't done in the aspect that it is today that's like really killin' people and hurting people a lot more.

When people think about the recession, they think so much about the middle class, and about people who have mortgages and homes and that sort of thing. I don't think people really think about how that trickles down to really poor neighborhoods—and South Park isn't a really poor neighborhood, but it's not upper middle class like what you always hear the examples of.

Right, that's what I was about to tell you—that South Park really used to be a middle class neighborhood.

You know, at one point, a majority of whites had lived there. Years ago. When my grandmother had first moved in the South Park area, my grandmother and my grandfather, it was predominantly … a majority of it was all white people years ago. You know, as more black people had moved in and … saying this, just as it's being said—more black people start moving in, a lot of more things in that environment changed once again. The environment started having more drug affiliations, more robberies, burglaries, killings and more children that are roaming the streets, doing things they gotta do as far as prostitution and so forth. You know, from being hooked on all types of drugs and stuff … and because it's a minority neighborhood, and I'm not just saying just blacks or whites or Mexicans or whomever. Whatever ethnicity you are, it can happen in your neighborhood. But I'm speaking on South Park right now … that … it's a lot of work in that minority neighborhood, a lot of blacks tend to kind of get into the dope dealing scene because that's all they *hear* about as they growing up. Like that's the thing to be or to do when they're listening to our culture of music such as hip-hop, rap, and these rappers are talking about it. So, they're constantly seeing it from family members that they were kids to … I mean, just growing up. You know, you see your aunts and uncles smokin' they weed and doing they thing. It seems like it's nothing, but it's already instilled in the values of doing those things is not bad to that child because they've seen it done all they life so they grow up and they do it, now they're dope-selling, and they still in South Park years from now, with their kids and so forth, so now it starts *spreading*. It starts spreading. It starts kind of putting neighborhoods as far as statistics, saying that we have the highest crime rates and that we have the highest drug rates and incarcerations and deaths and things that are going on. Because within the last three years … the people that have died in the South Park area alone or that were found dead in the South Park area has *risen*. A lot! Half the people that were here two or three years ago is not standing here today! Every year I have someone that … the next year, they're not living. And it's people that I *know*. It's not happening just … it used to be happenin' every now and then, then it started being in our own backyards, now it's being right next to us, the person that was sitting right next to us disappears now. It's *that* close, and it's happening *that* often. So, as far as me involved in the South Park community, that's something that I try to work on every year to just try to bring unity there. And because I do music I know that hip-hop has a lot to do with it. I'm from South Park. This is where I was born, this is where I was raised and my family still lives there. I'm *always* there. So I chose the place to start where I was from first. I hope that, in the future that I can take it to other neighborhoods and start building unity in their neighborhoods. I know it won't change the world but definitely will instill something for them to think about and hopefully change someone's life to choose another direction.

How do you feel about the new generation of kids coming up in South Park?

The newer generation of kids coming up out of South Park, which is … I have a little brother. So … looking at it right now, my little brother is incarcerated *again*. And I'm saying *again*, you know what I mean? Because the new generation feels like the only way to survive is to sell drugs to make it. Or to *rob* someone to make it out of South Park. I mean, I'm like *amazed* every day seeing someone that I grew up with or that I remember was a kid from South Park … to hear something or be looking at the news and see my people on there, and it's like, "Oh my god, I couldn't believe that they *did* this!" Because it's somebody that we *know*. But it was happening like *all the time*, in our neighborhood. This new generation is coming up and they are *learning* the wrong things and it's killing them. So many, every year. I know it's most definitely over one, two or three that dies every year from South Park alone—people that I know for myself. And they're *kids*. They're probably not even to the age of 25 yet. The value … the value of life, throughout the world but most definitely in South Park, those kids there … they have a whole different perception of *life*. Like the value of it is zero to them. There's no value no more so they have no standards. They don't have anything. They think what these rappers rap about, as far as the ... sippin' syrup and smokin' weed and selling they rocks, sellin' pounds or ounces or whatever, is ... what it *is*. But it is *not*. I feel like the new generation from the South Park community is kind of growin' up in the era where it just seems like ... because knowin' the parents that have been there, like my grandparents or the other people that *live* in this neighborhood, they're well-rounded people. It was a middle class neighborhood, like I said, back then, so I would say that they raise their kids up the right way, but once they step out, the kids step outside of the door, the kids got *lost*. So I feel like there was a *community* loss. Because now, even just so I know it happens in more places than South Park, it's a *community* loss where the *community* is not taking initiative and trying helping each other. As far as back then, your next-door neighbor could whoop you, you know what I'm saying? You can't do that now. It's like nobody will take the initiative of seein' some of the crowd doin' something wrong, like in the new generation, and correct them ... to *correct* them! But no one takes the initiative to stand up and do that, and say, "Hey man—that's not what it is," and this and that. You know, you might get some of the *older* people—if they're out—but they don't *be* outside hearin' people like that. So they're not ... I feel like they're *missing* something. They're missing something as far as when they go up out of their parents' door, they get lost. They start learning a whole new teaching that's not of good health. Or wealth.

You have a sense of history there and a sense of what a bright future for South Park would be. Are there advantages and disadvantages to being a female voice in that movement?

Yeah, I most definitely think it is different. The advantage is ... that I'm a female [*laughs*]. And for one, guys like pretty females. I feel that God blessed me to where I'm pretty. I feel like ... I got your attention *already*. Right there. But to be able to deliver something positive into your life because now I got your attention ... now I've got you looking at me another way as well. Before you ever hear me. At the same time, the disadvantages are ... some people feel like if you a woman and, as far as the guys ... or some of the women, or ... if you a woman and you don't sell dope or you ain't did this, "You don't know so you can't tell me," and, "Man, man, you don't know." Basically, they feel like the drug dealers and the people think they're the only one that know what they do and how they do and, "Don't nobody else understand." But that's not true. Because you don't know what this woman has been through in her life that's tryin' to tell nobody that, "You don't know." It's hard just to fight in the battle as far as a man and woman. Because the man, of course, *should* be the head, but even when they're not, they wanna be the head in the wrong manner. You know? So, it's that battle we're kind of fighting, and I feel like that's what kind of ... throughout the years, because I'm in a male-dominated industry in this rap game, I've always had to really physically, mentally fight my way through, because I was always underestimated some kind of way. So I always had a big voice. Me, being 14 and in high school, I had a big voice. That was my defense right there. I thought the world was right in that voice, but I didn't care if they liked it or they didn't. So, you know, that's what made me a stronger individual. That kind of pushed me to have the power to take someone's attention, as a woman, when I'm trying to deliver something. The perfect words that I'm trying to give them.

Do you see the industry adapting to stronger female presences?

No. I don't see that, so Lance I'm not gonna tell you that. I don't see that as changing. Because I feel like, as we know, the industry has been one way. The business is built one way, and that's the way they're gonna operate music. I mean, they can care less if you've got talent as far as the industry goes, you know what I mean? They wanna know if they market you, are you gonna make some money? It's the strategy of how they make money. That's why you can have Lil' Kim come out and then Nicki Minaj comes behind her and they use the same marketing strategy, because they know it's gonna work. It's just to make money. That's their purpose, to make money. It's not about ... I don't feel like there is still a voice for the female in hip-hop. I don't feel like they are respected. I feel like our voices are more being heard than they were back then, but they ain't opened that door yet. They ain't gonna do that yet. They ain't did that yet. They still hold us back. That's why you still get more rap to come out in the game that's only one rapper, or one female rapper period in the game. Why every time one female rapper come out, that's the only one that they let through the industry? Other than that, they let Rick Ross or Ludacris or whoever else ... they'll drop a whole buncha dudes per year, but ...

Like they're rationing them out.

Yeah! They give you one female every six, seven years or ten years. That way it's easy, and the woman they *do* put don't have no competition. I know that's how they've did the industry and they still rockin' the industry like that, because it's the pattern that they've been running off for years.

What influenced you when you were younger ... did you have somebody or something that just hit you early on, that made you really want this?

I think it's something that's *in* you, and then you be learnin' what's in you, so it wasn't nothin' like I was livin', and from practice I learned how to do it. I learned from something that was already within me, how to use it. And back then, I didn't have anyone that was in the music industry in my family that could help me, so it wasn't that. God kind of directed me on my own. I didn't have nobody to push me, but I brought along people who had any new pieces of information that would move me forward in my career and in my life. Some people grow up in a family and they can put them in a place. I didn't have that. I came straight from scratch. Just on my own. Even though my mom respected what I did and they liked the mixes and they would tell me things ... they enjoyed ideas, but I mean, they wasn't in the music industry, so they didn't know how to take me and put me somewhere, you know? That wasn't their field. So I feel like I was influenced by my mom listening to the music that she was always listening to. That's what I would always hear. I used to sing those songs and to this day I still remember those songs ... Stephanie Mills and Teena Marie, because those were the songs that ... my Mom loved music, so she used to jam it all the time. And my dad. I can't forget my dad because he was really the entertainer, but he just liked to dance and act a fool. I heard that my grandmother on my dad's side ... she sounded really good and she played piano, but I didn't meet her. She died right before I was born, so I never met her. So that's the closest thing to me that I had in my family oriented towards music. And I'm still learning it. I'm learning how to use it. You're using for God. And using it, not saying that it has to be a holier-than-thou album or song or whatever, but as I'm growing and maturing in life, of course the music is going to mature. It's gonna get wiser of course because these are the things I'm learning and these are the things I'm talking about.

What about the guys who talk about God, and their love for God, and they're still out there doing the bad things. What role do you think God plays in their lives? They're talking the talk, but aren't necessarily walking the walk.

That's something that I've been evaluating myself ... even though you're just speaking, your words are powerful. 'Cause if you're speaking, you're believing some of it, somewhere. The faithful must believe, and God got you. I know he got you. All of us got God in us. I don't care how hard they're lost. They're lost in that aspect. Ain't nobody that hard, though. Everybody has God in they heart because God created you. God is the air that's in us. Every one of us is breathing that breath of air through God. You're not that hard. So when you talk that other talk, on the other side, you're doin' something else, you're gonna go through that to where God is going to bring you to your lowest point, so you have no choice but to accept him. Some may lose they life before they're able to get saved. That's why it's always said that you better get saved and you better get the knowledge about who G-O-D is. Regardless of what you're doing. I don't care if you're the biggest dope dealer, the biggest killer in the world or something like that—*you* cut your time short when you keep going against God's will. I didn't know until I'd been studying in my Bible as effectively as I have this year, that literally, it is said in the Bible that we cut our time short. We can die before our time. Because you die, and God had that time set for you. God wants us to live fulfilled lives, and only we can shorten our life span. By choice. By going against God's will, by having a choice. God allows us to have a choice to make the decisions about that. And that distinguishes my life. God wants to fulfill us, but we cut it short by the things we do.

Anything else you want to throw in there in closing?

Let me say it like this: People wonder why all the negative stuff goes before all of the positive stuff. The industry is set up that way. That's the way it's structured. People are out there fighting—and it's not just me, it's not just K-Rino that's been fighting this fight—there's people that have been fighting for decades before us that's been fighting the fight to defend substance in music. At the same time, the negatives get exposed so dramatically. But what about if we expose the positives as much as we expose the negatives? We can change the mindsets of the people. I feel like hip-hop is the biggest marketing tool ever. Hip-hop is. Music, entertainment, video outlets, movies and music, all of that, is one of the biggest outlets that brainwashes people. If everything we hear or we see on television is negative, the mindset of the world is gonna to be negative. Now, if that gets changed around, and there's more positive things on television and more positive things on the radio, and more positive things in any type of media outlet ... if it's more positive there, I feel that the mindset of the people will be more positive. More technology allows more to be seen. With the internet, and giving people the ability of people to put anything on the internet, the *freedom* of it is hurting our mindset.

(2010)

DJ Gold

SOUTHSIDE

Lesser-known member of the Screwed Up Click who has been close to Screw's brother Al-D since the early '90s and was, for a time, a traveling member of the Screwed Up Click as they played shows around Texas and Louisiana. In recent years, he has been DJing at a strip club on the Southside.

One of the things I want to talk about is the connection between the strip clubs in Houston and the rap scene in Houston because it really is connected. You're producing, you're playing tracks [at the strip clubs], we heard some of the gangsta stuff that you were playing there... how long has that been going on?

Aw, man... I mean... really, that's where it's at. I mean, the connection is so serious that if it wasn't goin' on, a lot of artists wouldn't even get *heard* in the city, you know what I'm saying? Opposed to, you know, grinding out in the streets. It's all about your grind ethic, too. It's a serious connection because when you play that, and you instantly get a response, then you know that's something you can work with. You can keep on pushing it. But you have to try it in the strip clubs first because the girls are always—that's one thing—the girls are *always* gonna promote good music. If they feelin' the song, and they request that when they wanna dance, or anything... they wanna hear the song, you *in*, you feel me? And when they go dance in another club, then they gonna say, "Well, do you have this song? 'Cause I danced at the other spot to this song. I wanna know if you have it." And then that DJ gonna be like, "Okay," especially if the girl, you know, is a looker. Then he gonna respond quicker, and he gonna be like, "Okay, all right..." Then it goes around. It's a chain... a domino effect. It goes from each club to each club, and that's how it gets started right there.

So why is it strip clubs as opposed to the regular clubs? In the strip clubs they kind of test things out?

Well, yeah, you have more *leeway* to test things out, Lance, you dig what I'm sayin'? Because it's not an intense *set* like a club. Most... me being a DJ, you know, since I was 12... in a *club* club, dance club, it's intense because... if you go up to a DJ—even if you can get up *to* the DJ—and you ask him, "Hey, man, my song jammin'—can you play it for me?" See, there's a lot of things that these young cats don't know about, and it's called *DJ etiquette*, you know what I'm sayin'? You cannot just go up to a DJ, I don't give a damn how good you think you're jammin'. DJ etiquette is this: You do not go up to a DJ, man, and say, "I'm jammin', man, play my song." No, no, no. You don't do that. You go up to a DJ, man, and you say, "What's your name?" Nine times out of ten you already know who he is, especially at a hot club.

Yeah you always know who's up there.

Yeah, and you approach him and say, "DJ such and such, man, I have a song ... if there could be any time, you know, for me, man, here goes $20." Or, "You want something to drink with that? If you could just listen to my song ..." Just the *gesture* of that money, it always wins you, man. I'm just tellin' you from experience. You know, I been doin' this too many years, man, and I've seen it done with *my* boys. You know, 'cause I'm in the DJ pool, man. I have a comraderie with DJs across the nation because I've worked with them or I've done shows at their clubs. And it don't have to be me—I've seen it *done*. Because there's been guys out there that have been *taught* DJ etiquette. But it *is* DJ etiquette. I should write a book on *that*. In a nutshell, I get a lot more guys in the game quicker ... I get 'em in the game a lot quicker, man, because they'll know what to do. It is what it is. A DJ starts it off. Not the rapper. I mean, from the beginning, when it started in New York, you didn't ... it was just cats out there rappin' a capella. They didn't have no kind of beats until the DJs came and was beat *matchin'* and makin' these songs, catchin' these beats in between four bars or eight bars here and keepin' that shit continuously goin' so a cat *could* rap.

Kool Herc was rapping himself.

Yeah, that was the first *beat* machine. I don't give a damn what anybody talk about. Two turntables was the first beat machine because cats was doin' that ... when I first seen that, in the what ... that was ...

'70s.

Early, yeah, late '70s, early '80s, I was *sprung*. I mean, I knew, workin' or not, that's what I was gonna do all my life. But I mean, my role ain't over. I done had a beautiful journey so far. If I go tomorrow, I wouldn't complain about nothin'. I *couldn't* complain about nothin'.

I guess also, part of it, when you talk about those songs breaking in the strip club—if a guy that's in the strip club sees a girl dance to a song, he's never gonna forget that song, you know?

Right, right! Exactly, and it goes back to—*especially if she's a looker*. If she got the look, you're exactly right. He gonna remember that song and that girl. He gonna remember what she was movin' to. You know, because I don't care what it is. What song, what it is—country, whatever ... or Latino. If a song is movin' a person, it's motivation. It's motivational, period, because you jammin' to it and you know, it's makin' you move. So that's a good thing.

And now also we've seen—and maybe not even just in recent years, but because of the fact that strip clubs can stay open later, you see the clubs empty out and people go straight to the strip clubs. It's like a cross-promotional thing that happens with rap, and that doesn't happen with any other genre in Houston.

Right, right. And that's the big thing, because man you know when I was in ATL, they don't even promote the strip clubs like that, man, at the club. They don't do that, man. It's like *wild*, you know? It's a crazy thing, because when you go across the nation, man, they just don't rock like that. It's only in Houston where they cross-promote, like you say, the club with the strip clubs. And with us bein' able to be open 'til the mornin', they still got somewhere to party like 24/7. They come out the club and the sun will be comin' up. There's been countless nights, man, I done closed at six o'clock, you know?

Daylight.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, man.

And girls and guys going out to the strip club after the clubs.

Oh yeah! Yeah, man. I mean, just think for instance, like last night—that's like a slow night, you know, per se ... girls came in after the club like 2:30. It was a pack of girls came in, and at one point *they* was tippin' more than the *guys!* But it happens like that all the time, man. The girls, when they tip like that, then the guys be like, "Oh, naw, naw, naw ... they clownin' us out now." With some of them, it's just havin' fun and then, you know, a lot of 'em, man, that's they sexual preference. You get that a lot. That's what they dig. They just like the guys. They comin' in there just like the guys. Some girls just come to show love and have fun, you know, with their girlfriends. They don't even rock like that. You know, because, there's just something about women, man, they're more comfortable with each other like that. Guys ain't fittin' to do no shit like that.

When did you meet Screw? What year was that?

Oh man. That was in ... that was '90 ... '92? Yeah, '92, because I was back and forth from California and then I was DJin' for a group called Double Trouble in California. Kurtis Blow's group, as a matter of fact. I was back and forth, like I said, and then I would start workin' for Jam Down ... Jam Down Records. That's the first label that put Al-D out.

Oh right, right. Way back.

Jam Down. Patrick, yeah. I was DJin' and doin' some production with G411. We had got a crib in Third Ward, man, and we just ... we was at Jam Down and Screw was messin' with ... we was just doin' a lot of stuff, man. It was when Filero and them was doin' it back then, too. It was a Spanish group of rappers ... with Triple Threat and all them, yeah, Filero and all them. So it was a lot goin' on, man, and Screw was DJin' and I was doin' sound, too, 'cause that's what I did. I mean, anything dealin' with music, sound, you know ... DJin' ... I was there, I was doin' it. You feel me? So I kept runnin' into Screw, kept runnin' into Screw, man, and I hadn't even *met* Al yet, you know what I'm sayin'? Until I was runnin' into Screw, but I didn't know how connected they were until I start seein' Al come to the studio at Jam Down, and come to find out *he* was they main artist! Yeah, yeah! So Screw was like, "Yeah, man, I heard you doin' ... you over there at Jam Down, man. You know, my brother over there, man." He was like, "Man, look, you know, you a real cat," this and that, and it was just on the DJ camaraderie, you know what I'm sayin'? And he was like, "I want you to look out for my brother, man. He got skills, you know, you gonna hear his album. You over there at Jam Down with Pat, so I *know* you gonna be workin' with him and everything, so look out for my brother, man. We fittin' to get it in." So man it was *on* from there, man. Me and Al hooked up and we been brothers *ever since*. We just connected like right off the bat. There ain't been nothin' else but that, man.

So what was your impression of what was going on in Houston during that time? Like when you first got here—did you have any idea of what was going on as far as rap, at that point?

Oh yeah, man! Like I said, man, I was already *here*, man, I was just back and forth. I went to school in La Marque, man, you know what I mean? I'm a Cougar, man. I went to high school in La Marque, so I already knew about the Houston scene, and we was doing our thing down in Texas City and Galveston, man.

That's where I'm from.

Oh, Galveston! Yeah, I remember you said you went to Ball! Man, so I was ... so you know about Fila Mic then.

Fila Mic?

Yeah, Fila Mic from Galveston—you don't remember the big rapper that was down there, man? They called him Fila Mic. He got killed.

Man I forgot all about that.

He swallowed some dope. He swallowed a whole bunch of dope.

When was that?

Man, aw man—golly, Lance, you makin' me dig in the crate, brother! You makin' me dig in the crate, brother, for *real!* Man ... that had to have been '80 ... what ... '87?

Do you remember Screw ... were you around when he started experimenting with slowing stuff down?

He was already doing that. Like I said, it was early '90, '91, '92 and then I had ... like I said, he was doing his thing, so I didn't really grasp what was goin' on until I started *hearing* it and *hearing* it. He had told me, but naw, I didn't ... we didn't link up 'til Al dropped, and then that's when it was like on for us. He was like, "Man, you doin' this, Gold… you a good dude, I get a good vibe from you. You stay sucka-free." It was like, "I just… you know, you're lookin' out for Al." Like, "Man, I want you to rock with me, man." So it was on from there, man, and then that's when I start learning the process and seein' it. I'd be in and out checkin' it, and that's when I start just bein' around all the time and cats started droppin' CDs… I mean, droppin' tapes—and this was when there was digital recorders, man, 12 and 16-track digital recorders. Well, he started off on the little… I don't remember that, the little 4-track tape…

Tascam.

Yeah! You damn right, Lance. You damn right. He started off, he went to the 8, then he went to that 12, that 12 digital and went to that 16… well, you had a 8, then it was 12. Yeah man, I remember like yesterday. Them fuckin' grey tapes, that was the master.

So what did you pick up from him? Not even as a DJ, but as a producer or a listener of music, I mean what kind of things did you…

Aw, man—why you think my shit sound original like that? You heard it. It ain't no carbon copy, man. It's from that era, man.

Old school.

That's why I can produce that sound. A lot of cats wanna produce that kind of sound. I'm a cold motherfuckin' DJ, you hear what I'm sayin'? But he thought *outside of the box*. You view this Screwed Up shit like he did, and the way that he did, you knew he thought outside the box anyway. I mean, man, just to see him… because, if anybody knew the process, it wouldn't really mess 'em up, but it would really… they think that he's doin' this *all slowed* all the time. Naw, he was a regular speed DJ, and he would eat your ass up in any competition or anything like that, tricks and everything. Behind the back… we used to play… the only thing me and him had a problem with… [*laughs*] he had… I would have to go around the other side of the fuckin' box because Screw was backwards. Like, if I'm right, he left, so it's goin' the other way. He always set his fader like that, you feel what I'm sayin'?

Some percentage of DJs do that, right?

Yeah! So I'd have to go around the other side to even, you know, fuck with the shit. It was crazy, man! You got me laughing thinkin' about that shit right now, man, but I remember… we had a show, man, I'll never forget this shit. We had a show in San Marcos, man. At Gordo's. It's a club in San Marcos, and I think it might be like a historical spot, because they been open for many years, man. It has a balcony and everything, man. It's called Gordo's. Everybody was there, man, and Screw had an attack, man… and *passed out*. So everybody… Tommy, he was like our road manager at the time. He was the one… Tommy Langston. He was the one that handled all the road trip business. I got all the info from him to get everybody straight before we got on the road. So we was jokin' and trippin' and shit, and Screw, I guess he had him like a four [ounce cup of syrup]. I thought it was a deuce! Back then, drank was so plentiful, that it just wasn't nothin' to have it, you know what I mean? So we get to San Marcos, man. Everything cool, man. Screw got *hot*. He had a hot spell, man, so he was like… you know, we tryin' to wake him up, wake him up… showtime… because that was thing—we had come in like damn near right *in* the showtime a lot of times. Remember I was tellin' you about I'd have to call him early? To get at him, ready, before we *leave*? Man, when we *got* there, Screw was passed out!

At his house or at the club?

Naw, naw! At the club! We was all in the same van! We never went… we all rode together, man. That's why Pokey and them called me "Gold Patrol," 'cause I used to be in their… I had to be in their ass, bro! 'Cause I had to stay in they ass, man. You know, they was just slowpokin' and doin' all that kind of shit.

So how'd you get him up?

Ah, man, you know. Like I said, I called him early, man. I called him early, bugged the hell out of him. Let him know, you know, what time we gettin' on the road, man. Pokey, man, he wasn't too much a problem, man, 'cause you know, I used to love goin' over there off of Yellowstone anyway. 'Cause that's where his grandmother stayed, and she *always have some throwed breakfast*, especially if we leavin' in the morning, you know what I'm sayin'? Yeah, man, his grandmother used to hook a nigga *up* with that breakfast.

That's Pokey's grandmother or Screw's grandmother?

Nah, Big Pokey's grandmother. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Big Moe mama was the same, too. She always used to feed us before we left.

What would they make?

Ah, man. Pokey's grandmother, man, would have the grits and eggs and sausage and the bacon. Pokey a big cat, man, so you know, he eat up some shit. Yeah, he was on that football still back then. Yeah back then he was still playin' that ball. Yeah, but back to that—man, so we in San Marcos, man, goin' on this [place] fuckin' off the chain packed, man ... so, they tryin' to wake Screw up, and we ... the dude, the promoter is all like, "Oh, they here? We need to get the show started," this and that. So, we like, "Hold the fuck on, man, we just gettin' here ... and we still fittin' to wake Screw up." So Tommy was like, "Hey, man—Gold, you gonna have to go out there, man, and start this shit off." I'm like, "*What*?" I done rocked it in front of 20 or better, man, in a couple of venues, bro. I think that was the most nervous night I've ever had as a DJ.

Because you had to go before Screw?

I mean, because I had to start off *his* show! You feel me? *His* show! You dig what I'm sayin', man? He already started bein' the main *man*, man. I mean, you know, he sellin' tapes, man. He sellin' tapes like crazy, man. This was when they was in the white boxes. 100 in the fuckin' box. You know, I remember all this shit because *I* was the one sellin' the shit. So like I say, it was a long time, man, but you had ... you seen Screw, you seen me. When Al was locked up, and when we was all together, Screw ... I mean, you seen me, him and Al. And a lot of times, Shorty Mac.

So how many tapes—he would take tapes out on the road with him whenever he'd go out and DJ?

Oh yeah! That was our first thing. We had to pack the van and load it with boxes of tapes, man.

And you'd sell 'em all?

Man, we would never came back with no fuckin' tapes.

Ten bucks a pop?

Ten bucks a pop. That's what I'm tellin' you, man. That night in Austin, this was ... man, I'ma tell you somethin'. The *last* shows that Pat had was in Austin at this club called the Red fuckin' Barn, man. In Austin, Texas. Man, lemme tell you ... man we had such a great time, but did you know ... yeah, because I remember we had like maybe 1500, maybe 1500 tapes, man. That's why I say he made like 15 *grand* that night. Do you know I had ... the money box, it was a grey money box. I remember this shit like yesterday. Man, I couldn't hardly close that motherfucker, man. I sold ... I had to start stuffin' money in my *shoes*, in my back pocket, man ... every pocket was—you understand what I'm sayin'? I never seen shit like that in my life, man. Never, man. Al could tell you that shit, man. Real talk, man. I wish he was here, man ... that's when I knew ... man, this dude is like ... it's crazy, man. We never came back with tapes. Bottom line. All them nights, man, we *never* came back with tapes. Not one. It was amazing to me, bro. I'm serious.

What was it like watching Fat Pat perform? Or being in the studio with him?

Aw, man ... that was my heart right there, man. I mention him, but what makes me laugh just like I'm smilin' right now—all the memories are good with Pat. You know why? Because, man that dude was so talented—I was just talkin' about this on the radio, on Optimo [Radio], man, Sunday night—this dude was so talented, man, fuck *rap*. He could go onstage and be a A-1 comedian like it was *nothin'*, man. He could go and work the crowd, and have everybody in there rollin'. The dude was that funny. He was a clown, man!

That's all I'm tellin' you, man. That's all he like, man, baggin' on cats, man, and talkin' shit. That's what he was like. I said, "Man, you got a stupid slick mouth, man." And he would always bust out laughin'.

He had a real good sense of humor. You could hear that on the tapes because you'd hear Pat laughing all the time.

You'd hear Pat laughin' and jokin'! That's *him,* bro! That's all I remember about Pat, man. Anywhere we went, man ... he was like, "Gold, man—what's up baby?" 'Cause that's how Pat talked, you know what I'm sayin'? He was like, "What you think, man, you think my CD gonna *sell?*" I was like, "Man, is you *motherfuckin' crazy?*" 'Cause I told him, I was like, "Pat, man, you can't be rockin' all your songs like that." But he was so crunk, 'cause he was promotin' his *album.* He was so crunk, man, he did like, man, fuckin' ... eight songs a night, man. And we were tellin' Pat, "Man, you can't be doin' all your shit like that, bro!" He was like, "Fuck it—we comin' out the gate!"

(2011)

Captain Jack

MC

A stalwart of the Houston club scene who has been promoting and hosting club nights in Houston since the 1970s, Jack also released what is likely Houston's first rap record with his 1984 single "Jack It Up." Along with promoter Big Steve, who was in charge at the Rhinestone Wrangler back in the mid-'80s, he is responsible for the massive Konnections club nights that were a huge part of the city's nightlife when Houston rap broke nationally in 2005. Jack is still going strong, hosting and promoting events to this day.

So how long has that been going on—that kind of relationship between the clubs, especially the hip-hop and the dance clubs in Houston, with the kind of after hours thing with the strip clubs?

First thing about strip clubs—strip clubs really, really have kind of taken over. Kinda taken over things. And stuff was goin' like that in Miami, and now it done kinda made its way to Houston, you know?

The party just sort of continues there. I guess if you were to trace it back and to say there was any stigma attached to a strip club, it seems like it's kind of gone in Houston, huh?

Yeah, yeah, yeah. You're right. I mean, you still got the strip club action, but it's *always* late night. You still got your regular strip clubs, people go to Treasures and The Men's Club and stuff like that. Especially on the black scene, you know, the after hour thing has really, really taken off.

How long's it been like that? I mean, you've been doing this for decades, really. Was there an after hours scene back in the day? You started promoting clubs and stuff in the '70s, right?

There wasn't much after hours going on. There was probably one or two places that did that, and those were private clubs.

I would love to hear you kind of break it down and talk about the growth of that, from the early days of the after hours in the private clubs to now, the way it works now.

You know what? Back in the day, there was one after hours spot…I'm tryin' to think what was the name of that club…I remember there was a club called the Red Room that used to stay open after hours off of Dixie Drive. And they used to sell what they called "near beer."

I remember that!

You remember that? Yeah, "near beer." It only had a little small percentage of alcohol in it. But they would be open, they'd stay open 'til like four or five in the morning, and people would leave all the other clubs and fall off in there, man, and pack that place *out*. And that was the only place I knew to go for after hours. Now, before that, before I got off into the DJ scene—and that was before I got off into the DJ scene—I'm actually talking about the '70s, really, because I've been around longer than dirt. But there was another place—there was another club that we used to go and hang out at that was right there close to Downtown, off the edge of Montrose, close by the freeway… As you get ready to get on the freeway, the club was at Smith Street… they didn't even have a DJ. They had everything on reel-to-reel. They had all the music on reel-to-reel! But they had the *hits* on there! Everything was recorded, and there was a guy, when that reel would run out, he'd go in there and flip it around or put another one on and that thing would play for like three hours. Yeah! It would play for like three hours, and you know, you couldn't request nothing, you had to just jam it, but they had the hits on it! And people would pack that place out, and party up in there. But see, those clubs—back then, those clubs… it's so different today. You know, *none* of the strip clubs was doin' nothing like that. I mean, you couldn't go to—you didn't have any clubs where you could go and party and then you could watch strippers and all that kinda stuff. All the strip clubs had to close at two o'clock. Back *then*. The only place you could go that stayed open all night was a place over in Third Ward on Wichita called The Big House. And The Big House was all nude, but you had to have a membership. You go there, they stay open all night long. Now, you could go there, but that really wasn't a party place. That was a place where you could go and watch women come out, strip down naked, do all kinds of tricks with the vagina and all that kind of stuff, and they [had] a room—a little hallway in the back, they would line up five… about 10 or 12 girls, you could go back there and pick you one, take her upstairs, and do what you wanna do.

And that was an after hours place?

Well, no—that place actually, I don't know if that place ever closed!

New Orleans style.

Yeah! I think that place was a 24-hour place, because that place was pretty much… that place was kind of like a strip club whorehouse. That's all they did in there was prostitution. I mean, you'd go in there, they had rooms upstairs, you go up there and do your thing. But you had to have a membership. Anybody couldn't just walk off in there. They had a little slot door, you'd look through that slot door, and you could see out that slot door and they could see who's out there, and they ask you to show your membership card. Raise up the membership card, and then they come in there and the guy check your membership card out, check your ID out, and, "Go ahead." And in order for you to *get* a membership, you had to come with somebody that already *had* a membership. You could not just walk up there as a stranger. You might be undercover.

You might be a cop.

So if I'm gonna get in there, I gotta go in there with *Lance* because Lance got a membership, and he gon' say, "C'mon, Jack, I'ma take you over here to this spot, man, my spot, man. But you gonna have to buy a membership, but you can get one 'cause you with me." And that's the way it worked.

So that place was around for how long?

It was around for a long time. I guess that place hung around… I discovered it in 1974. In 1974 I discovered that place, because a friend of mine from Louisiana—he used to work for Hostess Bread Company. And he stayed right across from me, and me and a cousin of mine, we all went together, and he took us over to that place, and we all got memberships, and then we went back *again* and *again* and *again!*

That's the idea.

Yeah, that was the idea, man! And that's what we did, man! We had fun at that place.

So when did strip clubs in Houston start staying open all night?

Okay, I would say… It ain't been *that* long…

I didn't think so.

Nah, it ain't been that long. Oh I know! I'll tell you exactly when they started. I'll tell you exactly when they started, Lance: When they changed that law from ... where the ladies could be topless, and they turned the clubs into bikini clubs, and a lot of the BYOB clubs started opening. So, by them being BYOB, they had no restrictions on how long they could stay open versus a regular strip club that has a liquor license. The clubs that have a liquor license, they supposed to close at two o'clock. *Or*, if they're gonna stay open late, of course they can do that with an extra late night permit, and have to put up the liquor. But, they also take the risk of ... if anybody is drinking after two o'clock, they'll lose their liquor license. Whereas a BYOB club, you can bring in your liquor off the street. And, of course a lot of these after hour clubs that got these BYOB—even though they BYOB, they still find a way to try to sell a little alcohol illegally up in they joint. To make money.

Well, that's the whole thing about after hours, really, though—it's really kind of off the grid. Cash transactions, kinda separate from taxes and credit cards and all that kind of thing, right?

Right, right, right. They'll keep a—they don't do no credit card, but they'll keep a ... like in Legends, they have the ATM machine there. They have the ATM machine in there so they can make sure you get your cash.

They'll put the ATM machine right in front of the stripper pole.

Or not far from it!

Some of the artists that you work with, are you having them perform at Legends when you're doing your after hours thing?

Yeah, sometimes. As a matter of fact, when we took over Legends, we did our grand opening with Trina, and then we brought Z-Ro in there. We did something with Z-Ro.

Is it becoming more of a standard thing for artists to perform in the strip clubs like that?

Yeah, a lot of strip clubs either bring in artists to perform every now and then or they bring them in to host. A lot of hosting going on now.

I really wanna ask you about the single you did, "Jack It Up." What was that, '83, '84?

'84.

'84. And was that the only single you did, or was there more?

No, I did another one two years later called "Sexy Girls," on Rap-A-Lot Records.

Oh yeah? And it was a single or it was an album?

It was a single.

We know "Jack It Up" as a piece of Houston history, the same way we know "MacGregor Park" and "Car Freak," early tracks like that, but did it reach outside of Houston? Did you get national attention for it?

"Sexy Girls"? I don't think—I think it was more regional. I know that it did good in Dallas, Houston and maybe some parts of Louisiana and stuff, you know, because that was a different record company.

ALA Records was the one for "Jack It Up," right?

Yeah. ALA, yeah.

What was that label? Were they from Houston?

The label—actually that label was originally Grand Records, which was out of Memphis, Tennessee, but the whole thing was backed by ... Grand Records was actually out of Houston, in partnership with a record label out of Memphis. The club owner that owned all those clubs back then named Charles Bush.

Yeah, and Ray Barnett, right?

Well, Ray Barnett wasn't involved in the record deal. Just Charles Bush was doin' that part.

I just knew they were the big club owners back then.

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

So Charles Bush was the one who was funding the record?

Yeah.

And what else did they do? Did they release other stuff, too, or just your single?

They did that single. I mean, we did that single and of course they screwed me real good on that single, and of course I didn't do anything else with those guys.

That's how it worked, I guess.

You know how it works. I made my money off my shows, but as far as the record sales, I didn't reap any benefits on the record sales, but I know the record did pretty decent, because I found out later about all the different cities that that record hit. I mean, the guy that put it on YouTube is in London!

Is that right?

Yeah! The guy that put it on YouTube—he's in London!

It's so funny how so many people around the world, but especially in Europe and Australia, are really, really into Houston rap, and they're really into the history and will dig up records. That guy puts it on YouTube and yet none of us can find a copy of it. It's hilarious how that works.

Yeah, man! I mean, I had a friend of mine, a DJ ... I forgot his name now. Little bitty white boy ... I forgot his name, man! But he made a copy of "Jack It Up." From a European ... it was a European copy, and it was ... I think it was a gold or green vinyl, and when you play it, instead of playing it on 33, you'd have to play it on 45.

Darryl Scott was doing some slowed down tracks on his mixtapes before Screw ever did—do you ever remember anything in the clubs, people playing anything slow in the clubs?

Nah, not before Screw. *I* didn't. I didn't hear anything slowed down until Screw came along with it, and then I probably ... man, I'll tell you the truth—probably my first slowed down, screwed record I heard was probably Lil' Keke and "Pimpin' Tha Pen!"

Oh yeah. That's a classic.

I heard about—I liked ... and I dug *that*, you know what I mean? I mean, I used to *hear* about this DJ Screw character, and what he was doin' over there. Because I think he was in ... what's the name of the place ... *Carabana*. He had a Wednesday night, and they called it "Screw Night." He had a Wednesday night and they called it "Screw Night," man. He would do his thing, man, and you used to hear about him ... but I didn't know ... I didn't really hear the music until I heard Lil' Keke, and then after that I started hearin' more of the music.

Because you didn't hear it in the clubs—that was the weird thing about it, huh?

Nah, nobody was playin' it! Nobody would screw their music. He had the proper head to make that music popular by *recording* it. And that's how he made it popular. He had to record it first, because if you DJed straight in the clubs people'd look at you crazy. They look at you, "What the hell is he doin' with my record?"

You had to hear that out of cars.

Yeah! You had to hear it out of cars and stuff. And then ... after he started recordin' his stuff, man ... they really could *feel* it when they get high. That kind of movement is what started makin' this thing ... make it go like it did. For real.

If you'd like to track back, tell some old stories, I'd love that.

Oh yeah, man. We can go back all the way from the '70s to the '80s and ... oh, of course, we have to put in the book—unless you've got some other proof, now ... I don't know if you mighta found some other proof ... I *think* ... I'm almost 100 percent sure that I had the *first* hip-hop record in Houston.

It was either yours or "MacGregor Park." They were right around the same time. I don't know which one was first ...

Yeah, I heard "MacGregor Park," but I heard his later.

I think you had the first 12", maybe his was a 7"? I don't know ... I just know the story of Robert Harlan, and that he did the song "MacGregor Park."

I remember the guy. I remember the guy, how he looked and everything. I met the guy. He used to come to the club where I was.

Did he perform in there, too?

No. No, he never got to perform there. But I heard his record probably … mine came out in '84 … he might've came out with "MacGregor Park" right around … I'ma say around '86. Yeah, when he came out with that song "MacGregor Park." Because … man, they wasn't … I mean, the reason why *I* know that I was first because Magic 102 played my record, and at the time when they played *my* record, there was songs like "Captain …" what was this guy's name … some guy outta St. Louis had a record … I can't remember his name. What was the name of that record … him, and then, of course you know the guys—all the cats outta New York, and so when "MacGregor Park" came along, I remember it bein' a summertime song, and they started playin' the record. And I never … I never even saw a copy of "MacGregor Park."

Well if we do ever find it, we'll know then.

Yeah, but Lance, what are some of the other things you guys wanted to know?

Well, the book … it's a story about rap, but it's also a story about neighborhoods and people, you know?

Yeah, well lemme tell you a story that I told *Ozone* magazine. I think I can tell you this real quick. This story is a story that only I can tell, and this is a story about Rap-A-Lot Records, how Rap-A-Lot got on the radio. Rap-A-Lot got on the radio through Captain Jack. Lil' J Prince, who is the CEO of Rap-A-Lot Records, he was trying to get his record label off the ground. And he didn't have the connect, and even though [this was] in Houston, he couldn't get the *love.* But at least by *me* bein' in the club—and, of course, I had a very good relationship with the radio station. I always have. When I recorded *my* record, he was tryin' … he had "Car Freak" ready to go! *But they wouldn't play it.* The radio would not play it. Matter of fact, they wouldn't even hardly come out and talk to him. But … so, when I recorded "Sexy Girls" on Rap-A-Lot, I took it up … I walked my record in, and it opened the door for Rap-A-Lot. First of all, it got Rap-A-Lot on the record as a label, because I got my record played in 24 hours. Soon as I walked it in, gave it to Ron Atkins, who was the PD [Program Director] of Magic 102 at the time. He listened to it, because he always liked me and he always asked for my input. Now, from the night clubs, when I was—I always played new stuff in the clubs, and I played the hottest stuff that I thought was *hot*, and he would always ask me, "What's hot in the clubs? What's hot in the clubs?" Well, then I came out with my *own* record. You know what I mean? I was like, "Ron, tell me what you think." He said, "I *like* it! I gotcha." I was driving home … man, he played the record before I got home. The record was on the air. He put it in *full* rotation. And *that* is Houston. Now, I can't speak for outside of Houston, but in Houston, I opened the door for Rap-A-Lot Records.

Wow. That's the first record they played on the radio, huh?

That's the *first* Rap-A-Lot record got played on the radio.

That would make it the first Houston record, right?

Thank you very much. And it was Captain Jack. And check this out: Probably a few months after that? I got "Car Freak" on the radio.

Nice. So that's early on—that's what, '86? Maybe '87?

There you go. That was the beginning, man.

We know what happened after that.

We *know* what happened after that. And then I was one of the people helped get "Mind Playing Tricks" on the radio in Houston. Now, they got airplay outside of Houston, but I helped get "Mind Playing Tricks" on the radio in Houston.

And we know what happened with that.

Exactly. The blow-up. The video. It was on and poppin' after that, man. *On and poppin'.*

(2011)

Z-Ro

RAPPER · MISSOURI CITY

One of the most sought-after artists in Houston today. Known for his skillful rhyming, soulful singing voice, and over 20 albums of Southern classics under his belt, Z-Ro first gained notoriety with his 1998 album Look What You Did To Me. *Z-Ro was involved early on in his career with the multi-neighborhood group Street Military and later became part of the Screwed Up Click. He is also a member of the groups ABN and Guerilla Maab. The interview was conducted in an empty strip club in the early evening.*

You were going over [to the Street Military house] early on, right?

Yeah, yeah. I was over there damn near … I ain't gonna say the *beginning*, but in *my* beginning, I was like, yeah, I was over there. Like '94 … like '93, '94. I started fuckin' with Flea first. You know Flea from Ridgemont, from Mo City. I ain't know who the fuck they was. I was just like, "Man, who is them niggas always come over here every day whoopin' … beatin' people up and shit? Who these niggas is?" And they was like, "Man, you know, that's, you know … Street Military. Flea." So shit, man, I slid 'em a CD. I ain't even … you know, way back then, I wasn't … I was tryin' to do beats and shit and I … I was good, but like I say, I can't mix. I couldn't at all back then, so I gave 'em some shit, and they was on some … just on some smokin' weed shit, and you know, Flea, out of the group, to me, he gonna get the deepest on the round. He gonna really make you think about what he sayin'. That's where I got that, tellin' real good stories from, was from Flea. So when I gave him some shit about just smokin' some weed, e'rebody was talkin' about candy paint, swangers, smokin' weed, tryin' to fuck a bitch or some shit like that, so I had to switch that shit up. I gave him some gangsta shit, and he was like, "Yeah, okay. I feel this." He brought me to the studio, I mean … it was a wrap from there. We started gettin' it in from there. It was cool.

You went out to Fifth Ward?

Nah, we went to … where the fuck we went to … at that time, man, they was on like Braeswood. Nah, not Braeswood … Farm Park.

Where is that?

Shit, it's … it's down the street from here. It's on the West.

Okay it's on the Westside.

Yeah, they in Farm Park in some apartments over there, man, and that's just where they little headquarters was at. We'd go over to that bitch, get fucked up, cut on the instrumental and just … everybody would go off. And whoever had the best shit to say, that's who was gonna go to the studio that night type shit. That was right around the time when they had Bam and shit like that, so ... you know, Bam, Waterboy, all them motherfuckers from The Fakkulty and shit. So I mean, you know, it was a long ass time ago.

So what year was that, when you first started hanging out with those guys?

Shit, hell if I know. Shit, it was a long ass time ago, that's all I know. I was high all the time, so I just know it happened, you know what I'm saying? It was something like ... it had to be like '94, '95.

Okay, so they already had records out and they were already ...

Yeah, they had "Tears Came From Making This Dream," all that shit. You know, they already had all that shit out. And then like Fakkulty was fittin' to get ready to release they record with X-Bam, signed with X-Bam. That shit ain't do nothin' for me. When that time ... you know that's when KB and Flea came together to do they duet album with each other and shit, and I mean, that's when the shit really started professionally for me. So it was pretty cool. There wasn't no money involved because I was too new to the shit but it was cool, though. Got me a chance to, you know, fuck with other people who rap like how I was rappin'. Because I was listenin' to everybody else with that ... you know, no disrespect, 'cause I'm Screwed Up Click, but a lot of that was like, "Man, hold up, syrup in my cup," shit. I was like—you know, I jam that shit, but I ain't wanna be that. I wanted to be on some ... man, look, I want my shit to go everywhere. You know, and even though that shit went everywhere, I was wantin' my shit to be more realistic on the shit I was talking about. So, you know, just fuckin' with Flea, even though they was rappin' different, there was a lot of tongue-flippin' ... there wasn't really too much singin', unless Klondike was on that motherfucker ...

Klondike was practically the sixth member.

Yeah, he was, he was the sixth man. He was the sixth man like a motherfucker, so I mean it was ... it was cool. That's where I got a lot of my game from. It was like mid-'90s with that shit. Mid-'90s. I was still younger than a motherfucker. I was doin' my thang.

Street Military really inspired a lot of people because the group aesthetic, with all these people throwing their voices into one thing.

Hell yeah, because I mean like when you do a solo record, it's more ... I ain't gonna say pressure because this shit is easy, but I mean there's more work for you to do. And you know ... when you're doing a group project, it's simple to just be like, "All right, bam!" You doin' a verse, so I mean, you gonna put your hardest shit in the one verse, and then when you gotta do like a bunch of solo shit it's like, "Okay, bam," now you gotta sit here and write three verses. You gotta make sure all that shit is on. That shit hard for some people, when they ain't really got nothin' to say. So even if you got somethin' ... it's better for you to get your shine on features and shit. Like when a nigga get on a feature I kill everybody because ... okay, I only gotta do it once. So this one time, I'm gonna make sure I stick the dick all the way up in you and fuck your whole shit up. So I mean, that's ... I mean, even if it's your homeboy, it ain't ... it's just a healthy competition.

Well also there's kind of a different aesthetic to it, too, though, right? I mean when you go in and you know you're working on an ABN record versus working on a Guerilla Maab or another project like that, they all kind of have their own thing going on, right?

Yeah, everybody got they all got their own thing going on but I mean, at the end of the day it's the same shit.

And it's chemistry, too, though.

Yeah, the chemistry. I mean, it's who you workin' with. But I mean, like, very seldom do motherfuckers bring shit out of me. I'ma bring something out of you before you bring something out of me, because by the time ... I'm gonna be thinkin' music from when I walk in the door. Like when I go in the motherfuckin' lab, everybody wait on me to come up with the hook first. Motherfucker might tell me, "We wanna talk about this," so once I get my shit down, that's when y'all gonna start vibin' off of me. I'm not fittin' to wait on y'all. Fittin' to go ahead and get this shit ... you know, I'ma get it crackin' so we can blow this motherfucker up. I mean, I know my role. I'm the frontman.

You say "seldom," which means that sometimes, there's exceptions. Can you name those? Can you remember times that you went the studio and somebody just really ... just pulled it out of you, the first time that you worked with somebody?

The only motherfucker that ever pulled anything out of me was K-Rino. That's the only motherfucker, and even on them times, I come up with the hook first. He pulled something out of me just because of the respect I got for him, and he was like, "I want you to do a song." I'm like, "Nigga you want me to do a song with you?" I'm like, "Nigga, you the greatest in the world." Like, "I'm not fittin' to fuck with you on no song. You not fittin' to kill me, nigga." Like, naw ... naw, fuck that shit.

How long did it take?

About three days! Man, that's like ... I'm not fittin' to slit my wrists. I ain't made like that. I can't ... fuck that shit. I can't do that type of shit, you know what I'm sayin'? But then I was like, "Fuck it." They played the motherfuckin' song, and I started listening to it. I was like ... so I just started comin' up ... I'm like, "The game goes on ..." I just started just thinkin' about some shit. "Okay, yeah, we gonna talk about gettin' some money, tired of bein' broke, the shit everybody always talk about in our circle, and we're gonna make this shit melodious. That's what we're going to do." And that's what we did. And I kind of just like fell in play, because it wasn't one of them type of songs where, "Okay, bam—we fittin' to prove our lyrical skills." It wasn't no shit like that where like, "Okay, we can be on some ... talkin' about some type of shit." Because back then, man, I was like ... man, please ... I'm listening to what this man is sayin' on CDs about sending motherfuckers' spirit to hell in neck braces and slappin' you so hard you can see your facial expression in his palm and shit. I'm not fuckin' with that shit! I was like—back then I was like, "I'm not ... I'm not crazy."

You gotta listen to it five times before you get it, before you soak it in.

I listened to that shit once and I know what it mean. It mean don't fuck with him! That's what that shit mean. It means ... it mean don't cross this man, 'cause he gonna whoop your ass without touchin' you type shit. So I mean ... but I was a big ass fan, so it just ... it took a while, but when a man ... when he was like, "Say man, you talenteder than a motherfucker," that's kind of like Jordan tellin' a motherfucker in high school ball, "Man, you talented." Like, "That motherfucker told me I'm talented? I'm fittin' to dunk on *everybody* now." That's how I took that shit, and that's when I started kinda goin' crazy with this shit.

Eleven years later now, we think about Screw's legacy, and how in Houston, the history really gets handed down. The stories really get told. People coming up really learn about the important figures and the important people in the timeline of rap music in Houston. How do you think his legacy has sort of evolved in the last ... even maybe in the last five years?

I mean, it's obvious, man. Everybody doin' chopped and screwed now. And that shit really should be chopped and *slowed*, but I mean ... it's evident. You got a lot of people on the East Coast slowin' they shit down or double-beatin'. A lot of people try to pay respect and double-beat forward. But you got a lot of people that's double-beatin' backwards and all these artists releasin' two CDs per one album. Regular version and screwed and chopped version type shit, so it's obvious what it does. I mean, you even had motherfuckin' Erykah Badu slow her shit down and [Lil'] Flip came on that motherfucker. And I mean, even today, with the new motherfuckers with the Kirko Bangz, with the new "Drank In My Cup" song, he slow that shit down. And I mean, "drank in my cup," that is a Screwed Up Click saying within itself. But I mean, like ... a lot of motherfuckers that's doin' this shit right now, they wouldn't be doin' this shit right now. It wouldn't be possible at all for them to do this shit unless Screw dubbed them worthy of the rap game. And it probably woulda took me a little bit longer just because I was ... Screw was fuckin' with me because I was different. I was the only one in that bitch that wasn't talkin' about how, you know ... how everybody else was doin' they style. The different motherfuckers you had in there, were like E—like E.S.G.—when he freestyled, it was like ... it was real rap. Like ... all this shit was real rap, but he was actually gettin' in that bitch and he was talkin' about shit that was goin' on. He could look around the room and rap about your shirt, your shoes was too tight ... you know what I'm sayin' ... your haircut didn't quite just ... blend right ... he was gonna rap. And like me ... I was gonna rap. Big Moe was different because he was gonna come in that motherfucker and sing. You got all this real shit around, so it was kinda like, "Man, I need you in my Click. You kinda like, complete the gumbo. We got boys who freestyle rap, we got boys who really rap, and then we got people who *really* rap. We got people who sing, and then we just got homeboys ..." I mean, it was like ... it was just a whole lot of different genres, and that shit was cool for me because I got to be around all that shit. And I got to create my own lane outta that shit. I created the pain rap for this Texas shit. I created this shit.

Those became moments on a Screw tape ... he kinda takes you through a story when you're hearing those different voices, they've all got different things to say.

And that's what make it cool. It go back to that feature shit we was talkin' about. He'd very seldom have too many people come back and rap on the same song unless it was just a few people. Like on *G Love*, you got Shorty Mac, Al-D, me, Grace, Screw ... I mean, like we all got to get on that bitch one good time and say what the fuck we wanted to say. And I mean ... when you know you got one time, you fittin' to pile all of the shit you got to say at one time and you gonna do it at one time. And get it off your chest and do it at your best. So I mean, you know ... that was real good practice for the real career that was comin' along shortly. So, you know, man, it was a blessing for me. I ain't ... we ain't even fuck with music like that. I met Screw, of course, to do music, but you look at most motherfuckers that's musical ... "Motherfucker fake, he don't do none of the shit he talk about." But Screw wasn't like one of them people because he didn't talk. His hands did it. So it was just like a dream to get in that motherfucker and actually witness him go in that bitch and do all that shit you heard on them Screw tapes. And after that, I forgot I was rappin'. I was just like a fan. Like man, you know, I'm fuckin' with DJs, but he doin' his shit? I'm like, "Yeah." I was fuckin' with that. When them turntables go off, we just ride and talk about shit. Like ... fuck a song. He'd have to ask me, "Hey, you did anything new?" "Oh yeah, I got this motherfucker. Check it out." And that was it. Very seldom put a new song on a Screw tape, unless it was some Guerilla Maab shit. We was always fuckin' around, just on some ... we goin' to the beach, we goin' to somebody concert, we fittin' to go to Hartz Chicken or some shit like that. I mean, that's what that shit was.

And he took you through that, too, because in that broadcast, during the times he would speak, he'd take you around the room ... he'd tell you who was there ...

Yeah. He gonna make sure everybody get recognized, and he was doin' that for a purpose. A lot of people was there to do tapes, but a lot of people was there to build they career. That's why he always made sure, he was like, "Yeah, Z-Ro, Screwed Up Click ... get ready, keep watchin' me." Or, "Yungstar ... E.S.G., Lil' Keke, Fat Pat, Hawk, Big Steve. Enjoli, Sherro ... you know, Grace, LOS ..." Even to the people that was just rappin' and not tryin' to do it as a career but as a pass ... I mean, he ain't pass over nobody. The man was real humble. He knew he was the shit, but he would never tell you that. That's why I fucked with him. Because if you walked in the room and didn't know who the man was, he wasn't gonna tell you that. That's why I don't do that shit. 'Cause I mean, that's just some ... a real form of humility to me. That shit is important right now. A lot of motherfuckers let this royalty name that they got go to they head and they forget who the fuck they really are, and it's hard when you fall on your ass to go back to who the fuck you really are when everybody like, "Oh, naw, nigga, I thought you was such and such ... oh now you back over here fuckin' with me?" So it's kinda like naw, you better stay grounded. Even when you get off the motherfuckin' ground, you gotta stay grounded. You might be flyin', but it ain't really smart to pull your landing gear up, because you gonna come down one day. I don't give a fuck. That's how I look at that shit. Right now, I'm soaring. I know

I'm soaring, but if I was to crash immediately, my motherfuckin' landing gear is out. I ain't never pulled that shit back in, 11 years later. My shit still out. Every day is different.

You'd been rapping for several years before you'd ever worked with Screw.

Yeah.

I know he didn't change anything about what you did, but what did the experience of working with him add to you?

Being grown. Looking at shit through a man's eyes versus lookin' at that shit through a warrior's eyes all the time. My whole shit before that was, "Oh motherfucker, you stepped on my shoe. I fittin' to beat your motherfuckin' ass." Or, "You bumped into me at the club. I'm fittin' to beat your motherfuckin' ass." "Fuck me? I'ma beat your motherfuckin' ass." Okay, for nothin', you just walk in here and you look like somebody I'm fittin' to beat they motherfuckin' ass, and just beat your motherfuckin' ass. Like ... you would never know how to be a man until you hold the hand of a man and see what that shit feel like. When they tell you, "This what you do, this not what you do, and this is why." Like a lot of motherfuckers will fuss at you and be like, "You don't do that shit," and they don't tell you why not to do it. So you look at them motherfuckers like, "Bitch, you just hatin'. You just hatin', 'cause I'll knock that nigga out in a style and a fashion that you could never do." But Screw would be like, "Aight, when that motherfucker wake up, and go get a gun and come back, what you gonna do then? You ain't even got a slingshot, nigga. What you gonna do when he get up and go home and come back. Nigga you gonna get me shot 'cause I'm fuckin' with you. Since you my boy, I'm not gonna leave you, so if you not gonna leave, I'm not gonna leave, but when he come back with a gun, we both gonna get killed. He gonna kill both our legacies before the motherfuckers even really start." So then you like, "Damn ... that nigga right. My bad. I'm trippin' ... 'Say dude—yeah, fuck me. Yeah you right ... yeah gon' ahead ...'" And that's probably the same dude today buyin' all my CDs and some shit. Just lookin' at some shit through some grown eyes versus some adolescent shit.

He really cooled people off, didn't he?

Hell yeah. I ain't never been in Screw's house and there was no ... like Hawk said, there wasn't never no trippin' over there.

And he just quietly demanded that.

He wouldn't demand it. It just kinda like ... you know you're not gonna go into church and light up a blunt. It was just some shit that was automatically ... you know not to go in Screw house with no bullshit. 'Cause for one, when you walk in there, you gonna be trapped in that bitch for three days anyway. So if you do fight somebody, you gonna be fightin' for three days. You can't get out. Once he lock them doors, and he go to sleep, you fucked up. You in here for the next 72 hours. But at the same time, you can't come around somebody that's showin' even the motherfucker you beefin' with love ... and there was a lot of times, man, you go in there and there's motherfuckers that were beefin', but when they walked in Screw house, they had to shake hands, 'cause it was kinda like ... almost an embarrassment to be like, "Man, Screw, you know I don't fuck with that nigga." Screw would be like, "Y'all take that shit ... wherever y'all started that shit at, get that shit right, then y'all come back in here together," type shit. But he ain't never have to do that because it was automatically understood. 'Cause he showin' you love, he lettin' you get on a dub, he lettin' you get on a dub. Why you gonna go in this bitch and fuck your blessing and your chance off at the same time? It don't make no sense. So even damn fools that was in there, you didn't know they was damn fools if they was in Screw house. You would walk in that bitch, "Hey what's up?" "Hey, how you doin'?" But you might see the motherfuckers at the club, "Hey, how you doin', remember Screw house?" "Nigga, fuck you and your mama." But you wasn't gonna do that shit at Screw house, though. It was just gonna be a mutual respect for everybody.

(2011)

Klondike Kat

RAPPER, PRODUCER · SOUTH PARK

Known as the Gangsta Of The South Park Coalition, South Park born and raised Kat is one of the original members of the South Park Coalition (S.P.C.) and is often noted as a member of the group Street Military. Originally cutting his teeth as a battle rapper in the late '80s, he developed as an artist in the early '90s and has continued to release well-received underground records on which he does all of the writing, rapping, singing, and production himself. This interview was conducted after his release from prison in 2012.

How long exactly have you been out?

Maybe ... since April 10.

It's been kind of a whirlwind, huh?

Yeah, yeah. I mean, well ... you know, it's all about picking up this bike and ridin' it again.

How long were you in?

Three years.

That's a big gulf. What happens to your creative process when you're in there?

Well, I mean, it's probably more in-depth, really, because you don't have all the obstacles in the way. It depends on your mindframe. You know, a lot of guys get caught up in sorrow, dwellin' on, "Aw, man, this is goin' on," and what's goin' on out there. But me, myself, I did a lot of ... more than music, because I did a lot of music, and that's like secondary. You know, it's like walkin'. I can do that without thinkin' about it. So, in the midst of makin' a lot of songs, I just did a lot of studying different things. A lot of self-evaluation, you know what I'm sayin'? Yeah, so I did a lot more than that. Studyin' a couple of languages ...

Really? What did you study?

French and Spanish.

Where was the prison?

Well they had me—I went three places. First they had me in Garza East, which is in Beeville, Texas, right close to the border, about 15 minutes from the border. Then they moved me to Hondo, Texas, which is close to San Antonio, and then where I did most of my stay was at Ramsey I, which is like maybe 30 minutes from Houston, in Rosharon, Texas.

Fuck man they had you on a tour.

Yeah, yeah. But I kinda ... like when you first get in the system, they'll do that, and shift you around and move you around, and then they'll get you one place, and that's where you'll mostly do your time. So, the first couple of months, they'll move you a couple of times.

The way that people are cycled through there. It's become just ... big business.

Yeah. It's big business.

And then you see it from the inside and I'm sure it seems even more like a gigantic machine.

Oh yeah. It's definitely that. It's nothing but modern day cattle ... modern day slavery. It's all of the above. It's not about *who*. The individual person doesn't mean anything. It's just to get that number.

Did you keep in touch with a lot of people when you were in there?

A few, yeah, you know, mostly my real comrades. You know, [Point] Blank, K-Rino, Shan-No ... I kept in touch with a lot of them, and then a lot of my close family. So I kept in touch with a lot of people.

Did you have any perception of what was going on kind of in—you know, there's been some changes, since you've been gone, in the scene and just in the music that's being made and kind of the movement.

Well, I'ma tell you [*laughs*]. Dudes used to call me "The Library," because I ordered every *XXL*, *Rolling Stone* ... I had music magazines, *PC World* ... aw, man ... fashion magazines ... anything ... clothes design, all kind of stuff. So I would get 13 different, 14 different subscriptions every month, so I was kinda tuned in, man, to everything that was goin' on. And you know, we got radios and stuff, so I would hear things that's goin' on, and I mean, I was on all the radio dials and I just ... I was already startin' to check out, man ... dubstep, the pop scene, because, you know, other than the rap, I'm a writer. So I'ma try to publish some songs out, too. So I been studyin' all the genres.

Wow, so you were on top while you were in there.

Yeah, yeah. On it. On it. 100 percent. I ain't miss a beat.

When did you start doing production?

Well, you know, I've always done all my own. From my very first CD, I've done all my own music.

From the EP—"The Lyrical Lion"—so you were producing way back then?

Yeah, on "The Lyrical Lion," I did all of those on there except for the last one Dope E. did—"Brain Matter." And then on my second one, *Mobbin' Muzik Melodies*, I did all them except one. Icey Hott did one called ... what's it called ... oh, "Material Life." Yeah, Icey did that, and then on the last one, I did all of them.

Did you ever do any producing with *Icey, with Street Military?*

Yep, yep. I did "Gasta Get Paid," and I actually did that track, "Gasta Get Paid," and then ... "Next Episode," me and Icey did that together. Yeah. Yeah.

Well of course that one's kind of yours, really. I mean that hook is so totally that song.

Yeah, yeah.

You were really the sixth man for them, right?

Yeah. Yeah. Anything Street did, I'm on it. Anything I'm on ... anything that I make, as Klondike Kat, you'll always see some of them guys on there. Just not all together.

Do you keep in touch with Pharoah at all?

Yeah, yeah.

Did you ever do shows with Street Military, back in the day?

Yeah always. Every time they did a show.

Do you remember any crazy stories from any of those shows?

Oh yeah. Without a doubt. I remember a time when we used to have Nutt—Nutt used to be our stage ... like a propster. He would do all the tricks. He would get the crowd hype while we rappin', man, and he would crowd surf and everything. And he always had a thing where they used to have this old breakdance move—they called it the "Donkey Kick."

Right!

You know, when you go down, touch your hands on the floor and kick back with your feet. And Nutt used to take cereal and throw it all on the crowd. He used to take some Cap'n Crunch and just throw it all out in the crowd. They'd be lovin' it, and you might have two—you had an HPD officer that was on the side of the stage, so Nutt was like messin' with him, you know, goin' in his face, "Ahhh!" Just messin' with him. He'd go around, mess with the crowd, he'd come back and mess with the law, you know. And the crowd was getting crunk 'cause he was doin' it—and he turned around and Donkey Kicked him, man. And I'm talkin' about was like a *centimeter* away from the man's face. Kicked dirt in the man's face and everything. The law got mad! He pulled his handcuffs like, "If y'all don't do something with this fool, I'm fittin' to arrest him *right now.*" We was like, "Man, Nutt, leave the man alone!" The law tried to grab him, he just jumped in the crowd and just crowd-surfed. We had to hide him because the law was lookin' for him after the show. You know, like, "I'ma get him." Man, he gonna put him in the car, y'all take him off. Yeah, man.

Icey was telling me that Nutt used to drop kick members of the group!

Yeah, yeah! That was just part of his thing. He gonna do all kind of crazy stuff, man.

Icey told me this story about this show in Dallas—some club up there where they just... he said, "Man, you'd go to this club, they would boo everybody, just everybody that came in there, they were booing them." It didn't matter how good they were, they booed everybody... Were you at that show?

Yep.

You were there!

As a matter of fact, I went *back* to that club *myself* and did the same thing!

They were booing.

They was like, "Man, we can't *never* enjoy no shows, man. These dudes *always* comin' in here dissin'." Half the crowd was like pissed off, you know what I'm sayin'? 'Cause this *same* group of cats would always crank it up, man.

And so you handled them all right when you went back?

Oh yeah. Oh yeah. I just did... I did like three songs and I basically just told the crowd, "Hey, man, I know y'all got a few people out here that's trippin', man. But for the ones who really came to embrace us, man, we love y'all. 'Preciate it." So, you know, we had some "yeahs," to mix with the boos. They was like, "Man, they always do this shit. Every time somebody come here they do that. They don't never let us enjoy no show."

So when was that? That was during Street Military time, so mid-'90s?

Yeah, in mid-'90s. Mid-'90s.

Were you doing a lot of touring around that time? Just as Klondike Kat?

Yeah, I stayed on the road. I would be gone like three months at a time.

Where all would you go?

Man, shoot—all over Texas, of course. Shreveport, Louisiana... Jackson, Mississippi... ah man... man, Tennessee... I been to Brooklyn, I been to Auburn, New York, way up there.

How was your show in Brooklyn?

I mean Albany.

Albany, yeah.

It was good! It was good, surprisingly. Man, I even battled a few rappers on the streets and stuff.

Oh yeah?

Yeah, me and Blank went out there, man, and man... ah, man, it's like they was trippin' that we was—"Y'all *can't* be from Houston, man. Y'all really from *Houston*?" You know, they thought we was some old country, cowboy ridin' boys. They was like, "Man, these dudes got some *skills*."

And they'd never heard that style before—that Southern style.

Yeah, and they was trippin' off it, like... we had the girls gathered around and man... these niggas went and did they little thing and I murdered him! He was like, "Man … you got the CD with you?" I'm like, "Yeah, I got some in the car." It was a lot of love and respect, man.

And would you experience that same enthusiasm when you brought the Houston style to other cities? I mean, you got booked, so there must have been somebody there that was into it.

Yeah, yeah. I got a lot of shows—I did a tour. A nine-city tour with … it was me, Scarface, Bam, Big Mike, Too Short … Goldy, that used to rap with Too Short. We did nine cities together.

Those must have been big.

Yeah, they was in like, coliseums and stuff like that.

Too Short was headlining?

Yeah, Too Short was the headliner. And Scarface was with him—did I say Scarface?

Yeah, Scarface would have been huge at that point, too.

Yeah, at that time, Scarface and Too Short was huge, together like that.

When you talk about battling, you were also battling back in the day like on The Battleground, with K-Rino? Were you a battle rapper back then?

That's how me and K-Rino met.

You were battling?

Yeah. See, when I was in junior high, my rap name was not even … when I was in middle school, my rap name was not Klondike Kat. It was something else. It was Devious D, and K-Rino went to a school in my neighborhood that was further down, and I went to *my* school, so I'd always be battling dudes in my school, and then they was like, "Man, there's this dude at Thomas, man … man, he cool—he tearin' up all the high schoolers." I was like, "I need to meet him. I want his crown." [*laughs*] So I traveled about 30 deep, you know 30 of my boys, we went to K-Rino school and waited on him outside. We set it up. So I'm thinkin'—the whole school let out … there was no K-Rino … So, you know, I'm cocky and confident. I was like, "Man, this dude must be scared. He ain't came out. I ain't seen him. He must ain't even come to school." Next thing I know, here come K-Rino. He come out the door with about 40 of his boys behind him, and he got the black book in his hand. I said, "Oh, he got somethin'!" I told 'em, "Yeah, he *got* somethin'." And me and K-Rino battled 'til the *sun came down.* Kids was like, "Man, I gotta go home, man, my mom lookin' for me, man! Man, y'all need to finish this another time!" Years later … *years* later … I told K that, too. This was like maybe 2006, I told K, I said, "K, you remember a guy, when you was at Thomas man, and you came out with a bunch of dudes from your school and there was a dude waitin' outside and he had a bunch of his homies with him? Man, y'all battled 'til the sun came down, man!" He said, "Yeah, man! That little sucker was *hard!*" I said, "Man, that was *me!*" I said, "Yeah, my name was Devious D." Boy, he bust out laughin'. He said, "Damn, that's crazy! Now I remember that!" He said, "Ah, man—that's cold, man!"

He never knew it was you.

Nah, he didn't know it was me. And then we met again—we met again battlin' when we was in high school, and we met at a school over here by my house, in a park, so there was some people from Sterling High School and a lot of people from my high school, and at that point I had been battlin' for money. I wasn't battlin' for free no more. "We goin' $50 a round." I was like serious about it. I be goin' all over the place, battlin' whoever had juice. Me and N-I-P was startin' doin' that. And me and N-I-P kinda got into a disagreement or whatever, because like … I was feelin' like rap was goin' more towards reality than battle rappin'. I always still wrote my battle rhymes for battles, but as far as when I wanted to make *songs*—this was before we even got deals—I still was like, "Well, I'm gonna make my songs talkin' about what's goin' on," you know what I'm sayin'? But N-I-P was rappin' psycho. 'Cause we used to be a group called the Forever Def Crew, me and N-I-P, and our styles started to clash. I was like, "Man, you talkin' about feedin' babies with unleaded gas and …" you know what I'm sayin'? And

I'm talkin' about *life* situations. As far as a *group*, it's not gonna come together that way. So we split ways. He was kinda bitter about it, but you know, we still homies. We still cool. We stayed cool. He realized what I was talkin' about once he did his own thing because that put him in his own lane. That put him in his own lane. Nobody was doin' what N-I-P did, and it ended up workin' for him. Yeah, it worked out for him.

Yeah because then he could make that his whole thing at that point. He didn't have to make a concession.

He wouldn't have been the full *Psycho* with me addin' my part to 'em, and then I wouldn't have been the full, like, lyricist that I was, and wouldn't have been able to incorporate my singin' melodies with the *Psycho* stuff.

The Psycho *stuff is not looking for those melodies.*

Yeah, yeah! You know what I'm sayin'.

That stuff's just gotta drive hard.

Yeah, so me and K-Rino met to battle then and I was like, "K, man, I don't do this for free, man." K was humble, man. He was like, "Man, I do it for the love of the art." I was like, "Man, I love the art, too or I wouldn't be serious about my craft." When I found a dude that wanted to battle me, I made 10 raps with his name in it and then I had 50 raps just to battle with, and I used the last 10 just to murder him off with. Find out his business, find out anything goin' on with his family, whatever! I did my research, man. I took that serious. So, I was like, "Look, man—I don't do this for free. We can go $50 a line." He was like, "Man, I don't do this for money." I was like, "Well, tell your homeboys to patch up, you know? We gonna patch up, we do this for money." He was like, "Man, I do it for the art." He kept sayin' it. They was like, "C'mon K, go on and do it. Go on and do it." So, we went best two out of three. K wins and I win, K wins and I win it, and then they say, "Kat won." You know K. He was humble. He called me back about two weeks later, said, "Man, I wanna do this battle again off of either one of our turfs. I don't wanna do it on *your* turf or *my* turf. I wanna do it somewhere neutral. And we do it again." I say, "Cool." So we met up this time, I was like ... K was like, "Go ahead, man—go." I said, "Well man, I'ma do this for money. How much y'all wanna do it for?" He was like, "Man I told you—I just do it for the art. Man, I don't do it like that." So I was like, "All right, man, well look—I'm fittin' to go on and spit." And then, you know, so I said some little bullshit, low-grade rhymes, and K was like, "Man, that ain't even your caliber. I'm not battlin' that. You just chunked somethin' out there." He said, "I came to battle you." And I was like, "Man, that's all I got." I started to walk off. So K was like, "Come here, man." He said, "Man, I'm startin' this crew called the S.P.C., man, and we gonna form together, man, try to come together, man, and get our music out. Just be a crew and a clique, man." He say, "I like your rhyme style and how you put it down, man. I wanna, you know, get together with you." I said, "All right, well cool then! That's what's up!" He gave me his address, the next day I was over there. Shit, I been S.P.C. ever since.

That was kind of the birth of it, then. Right at that time.

Yeah, that was the very beginning of it, 'cause there was just a few people, you know, that was S.P.C. Rapper K ... N-I-P had just kinda got with him, too, a few months before that.

And they had a real legendary battle that brought them together.

Yeah! See, that's ... and that's how we all really came together. Me, K, and N-I-P, that's how we all came together. And I know—I gotta say this, too: I know that second time, he was ready for me! 'Cause he saw my craftiness. I saw him bein' crafty, he's like, "Oh, okay." I said, "I have to do my homework on this sucker. I'ma get him this time." I had a lot more stuff ready, but I was like, "Man, this dude hard to handle." I tried to—I always said that, "Hey, man, I'm winnin'. I've never lost battling nobody, so if a dude take me out, he gonna really take me out. He gonna have confidence in himself." So, I would use theatrics and everything. I'm movin' around, doin' my—animated and everything. It just turned out to be a beautiful thing because we all came together, man, and all that energy, all those raw MCs together, bein' around each other on a daily basis, man, that created some classics.

So there was an instant chemistry with y'all, once you all got together.

Yeah, yeah. And what I like about us all—even though we were all similar, we still had our own unique way of delivering. Our own unique styles. Like nobody just copied each other.

Not only that, but the voices were all really distinct. It was real easy on those early recordings—it's real easy to tell who everybody is immediately. You're all very, very different.

Yeah. Yeah, yeah. And that's what I like about us, because I used to hear—and still today you hear a lot of crews, one dude come in and you don't even know when the next dude came. "Who was that? Who was that?" They all sound alike.

But there's something about the music that makes it S.P.C. more so than just your voices together. There's kind of a musical direction isn't there? What would you say it is?

It's just ... subliminally, we all know where each others' mindframe is, and we feed off of each other, and at the same time, we feed off bein' individual in the midst of each other. So it's just like playin' piano keys, playin' the same key over and over. There's a high, there's a low, there's a minor, there's a major. We kind of blend them all together like that, and then we still all in the same mindframe, or within the same realm of doin' this music thing, and it comes out like that.

You got some future collaborations coming up? Anybody you're going to do an album or a song with that you've never worked with before?

Yeah, I just did two songs with Z-Ro, a song with Z-Ro and Mike-D from the Screwed Up Click. My son is puttin' it down now. He's nice now. He's 18. Him and my little brother is doin' something together. They call him "Brick," so I'm workin' with his stuff, too. Others like—I got a few features lined up with different people, man. I know Z-Ro talkin' about me, him and Slim Thug doin' something. So ... I talked to Pokey, I talked to E.S.G., I talked to Trae—they already, "Kat, when you need me, you know what it is." So there will be songs with these guys as well.

It's really one big Houston now. Everybody's collaborating with everybody else in a way that it's never happened.

Yep. Yeah, it's like Screwed Up Click and S.P.C., doin' a lot more stuff together, cats from Northside—because, you know, it used to be kind of divided, North and South—cats from the Northside and South gettin' it in, you know. Everybody just tryin' to collab and meet, man. It's just ... it's less plex, less turmoil as far as, "Ooh, I ain't gonna mess with ..." All that's kind of blown over now, so everybody just tryin' to network. This is the information era, so everybody tryin' to network with each other.

(2012)

KB Da Kidnappa

RAPPER · TRINITY GARDEN

An original member of Street Military, he was touring the country with the group (also consisting of Pharoah, Lil' Flea, Icey Hott, and Nutt) while still in high school. After Pharoah's imprisonment and the group's disbanding, he went on to forge a solo career, and is still making records today.

We were talking a little last time about Rap-A-Lot.

It's a hell of a blueprint been laid out here, man, by people like Rap-A-Lot. That was one of my favorite record labels, was Rap-A-Lot. They can say what they wanna say, but Rap-A-Lot is the bread and butter of Houston, and really showed a lot of artists from Houston that it could be done. And then when Houston picked up on the DIY, the do-it-yourself method, so far as pushing your own music, whether it be in the stores or out the trunk, that's when a lot of CEOs was created, during that situation. And to this day, I still keep that CEO mentality.

The real ones are out there with their trunks open.

The real ones will always stay out there with their trunks open. The real ones are always gonna do that sale, man. I love what I do. I'ma tell you the truth: I love what I do, and it's not all about money, man. It's just … it's really like a passion, a love. When you *love* something, and you have *passion* for something, man, it ain't *about* the money. The money comes and goes. Love for something—it's all about the passion and the love. I love doing music without receiving *no* money, but I like to get paid *from* it, and I like to make a living out of it, but even if I *didn't* make a living out of it, I would still be *doing* it. Because that's my love. That's my passion. If you in it just for the *money*, then … ain't no *drive* if the money ain't there. In this music situation, there ain't no guarantees. Money can be there and the money could be gone. And then money could come back and money could be gone. If your drive consists of *money*, and the money ain't *there*, then your music is … you can't create good *music* because you've got no drive!

How did Street Military come together originally?

Street Military consists of me, Pharoah Tha Thuggish King from South Park, Lil' Flea from Missouri City, Icey Hott from Hiram Clarke, and Nutt … was the fifth member of the group, was also from Missouri City, and the group consisted of five members, all from different parts of the Houston area. It's kind of funny how we came together. I mean, after it was all said and done, we sat down, and none of us … *knew our* *fathers.* There was five ghetto bastards in the group. Now, that was kind of crazy, man. It was like we all vibrated to each other. It was like it was destined for us to be together. When we started, there was three members already in the group. Icey Hott, Lil' Flea, and Pharoah was already clicked up. And they were coming out to this club called Charlemagne. It was a club on the Northside, not too far from my hood. It was off of Homestead.

You're from Trinity Garden, right?

Yeah, I'm from Trinity Garden. I heard about them coming to this club, and winning these rap contests. They was having rap battles, you know, and guys from my neighborhood was pushin' me on to go get in it. Because I was a threat in the neighborhood—I was like a rap threat in the neighborhood. Man, that's when it was just so *fun.* Where I could see a guy coming down the street, walkin' my way, and he see me walkin' his way, and he got his little crew with him, I got my little crew with me. It's almost like a Western showdown or something, you know what I'm sayin'? We was goin' around the neighborhood battlin' like that. It was fun, man. So I end up getting convinced to go get in these rap contests with Flea, Pharoah—which Icey was shinin' it up for—and I got in there and man, I end up winning this rap battle. Because there was a lot of people in there from my neighborhood and I had got a lot of support from my neighborhood. So I end up winning, and then when it was all said and done, we went outside and I found out that ... Icey Hott was my *cousin.* I didn't even know Icey was my cousin. That's where I met them guys and that's where we first bonded at. At that rap battle.

What neighborhood was that?

That was in Scenic Woods. It wasn't in my neighborhood. The club wasn't in my neighborhood. It was in another neighborhood, but it was a popular club.

And this was '90, '91?

This was '90. Yeah, this was '90. We really came out with our first record in '91. So, after that, you know, we went to that studio out there in South Park. Called Gerard Records. I would go up there and the first executive that we started messin' with was Keith Babin. To make a long story short, you know, they wanted me to join the group. So I was the last member to really join, because like I say, there's five members, but Nutt ... the guy that was the fifth member was this guy named Antoine. And he wasn't a rapper, he was just a guy that was with us.

Like Bushwick—but kind of like a fool, right?

Yeah, yeah, he was part of our clique, man. He was a part of our clique whenever we'd do shows. He would do all kinds of crazy shit like jump off the stage or jump off a speaker and land on his side. I mean, he was just ... he was a crowd hyper.

You must have picked that up from him, then.

Yeah, yeah. So that's when we formed Street Military, I was really the last rapper to join the group.

Where did you grow up?

I was born in Galveston, and my mother was from Port Arthur so ... I stayed in Port Arthur from like birth to 3 or 4-years-old. Then we went to St. Louis with my dad, my original father, and then my mother ran off from my original father, and came *back* to Port Arthur, and ended up meetin' a man in the *service,* and that's when we moved to Germany. So I started school in Butzbach, Germany, because my stepfather was in the military. It's so crazy because I ended up bein' in a group called Street Military, and I was like a little military brat around in Germany, playing in tanks and on army bases, shootin' machine guns on Field Day ... it's crazy, man. Whenever I think over it, I'm like, "Damn, I end up bein' in a group called Street Military," and a lot of people don't really know the background that I came from.

And so how old were you when you came to Houston?

When I came back to Houston, I was like 7. I was down there four years.

A lot of people lump together Fifth Ward and Trinity Garden because of their proximity on a map, but they're really very different neighborhoods, aren't they?

Yeah, yeah, they're different neighborhoods. Matter of fact, let me correct that—we stayed in Fifth Ward before I stayed in Trinity Garden, so I stayed in Fifth Ward, too. I was a resident of Fifth Ward. And they're right on the side, man. I mean it's like they're two, three minutes apart. But they're two different, distinct neighborhoods.

What makes Trinity Garden different from Fifth Ward?

Uh... nothing but the name. To me, man, nothing separates it but a name. It's a separated area to me, that's it. Same thing that goes down in Fifth Ward goes down in Trinity Garden. No difference but the name, man. And that it's recognized as separate areas, man. That's it.

Coming up, were there clubs in Trinity Garden and Fifth Ward, where people would rap?

Me myself, coming up, I never went to clubs. I got in the club when I was 14-years-old. That same club I mentioned where Street Military was at, my uncle used to get me in there. You know, I wasn't old enough, but that's where I first started going to clubs at age 14.

Street Military did a lot of work with Klondike Kat back in the day.

Man, you might as well go ahead and document this: Klondike Kat is probably really the sixth member of Street Military, man. We had so much love for Klondike, man. Whenever we needed singing, he would sing... Klondike was def, and he was a soldier, too. My first time seein' Klondike, he was on Gerard Records, and he was in an R&B group, like a singing group... I forgot the name of the group, but a lot of people don't know—Klondike Kat, he just don't rap, man. That boy can *blow*. I'm talkin' about he can really sing his ass off. That was one of things I really admired about *him*, how he was able to go back and forth between the singin' and the rappin'. And during those early Street Military years, we really bonded, man. Them were some beautiful years. Money don't determine the happiness or the friendship of a group. When we wasn't makin' money and we was doin' it for the love and passion, it was such a more harmonious situation. We was a true group, man. Without money, or none of that, we was true. Like when we was on tour, I'm tellin' you—there's some places that we can't even go back to, man. Shit, we tore up the fuckin' rooms! From wrestlin' and shit, like we was WWF or some shit. We was doin' pranks on each other, man. I mean, that's how we played on tour, man. It would probably be me and Icey teamin' up on Flea, Pharoah, and Nutt. When we were out somewhere, we would probably sneak back to the room and get their key, and go in their room and fuck that room up! Pour water everywhere, I'm talkin' 'bout man... we would fuck around and *piss* on they bed. They'd come back and see they room all fucked up, we laughin' and gigglin'. And then, whenever we slip, we not payin' attention, they'd get *our* motherfuckin' ass. We'd come back inside that room—man, I can't even sleep in my motherfuckin' bed.

Looking back, coming up the way you did in Trinity Garden, if you hadn't have been a rapper, what would've happened to you?

Well, I thought I was pretty good playing basketball, and before music took over, that's what I really wanted to do, was play basketball. And you know, I was a local drug dealer... I mean, music kind of... I think music was my savior. I'm not gonna lie. To sit up here and tell you what I would've been, man, is just... it's just assuming, man, that I woulda been this, I woulda been that, but to be truthful, I don't know what I woulda been, man. Honestly, I'm telling you—I don't know what I woulda been. Because before music came and took over, I wanted to play basketball. I didn't have nobody pushin' me, but... dealin' dope at the same time, I idolized dope dealers. You know—*money*. I left school at 16 and hooked up with Street Military—I really was on tour with them at the age of 16. It really swept in at the right time. Music saved me, man. I wouldn't have it no other way to tell you the truth, man. I don't regret what I've been through in life and I don't regret leaving school and doing my music. I don't regret none of that, because it was all a learning experience for me, and I got to see some things a normal teenager, an average teenager ain't get to see. I went on tour at age 16, traveling, and having everything... even though we were getting fucked over at the time, you gotta take the bitter with the sweet. Every disadvantage that happened, there was an advantage. It helped me to see some things, man. I couldn't get to these places on my own without being able to do this music, without being able to rap and express myself with words. So I don't regret none of this stuff, bro.

(2011)

Craig (BBC) Long

MC · FIRST WARD

As creator of the long-running party series The Bench, Craig is well known within Houston's hip-hop community as an artist, MC, party host, promoter and all-around music enthusiast. Since 2005, he has been the host of the MFAH Mixed Media parties at the Museum of Fine Arts Houston as well as his own monthly, The Scenario.

I just had a conversation with Raheem where we spoke of the old club the Rhinestone Wrangler and how he used to have to sneak in. Were you around back in those days?

Yeah, man the Royal Flush crew, man I used to go see those guys *all the time.* Southside, yo.

The Wrangler off of Murworth. He said those guys were the kings of that place.

It used to be packed, dog. And it's crazy how like hip-hop has changed, and especially in Houston. You know, you're talking about the age before computers, e-mail blasts, all that stuff. It was just like word of mouth, you know?

How many people do you think that place held?

We're talking about the mid-'80s and shit. I was in high school. Probably like 1,000, but you're talking about the fact that I was *smaller.* It was all bigger than life.

Now you got an idea of the size of a crowd because you have a different interest in it.

No doubt, no doubt.

How did the energy level of those crowds compare to that of The Bench?

Well, back then the MC controlled the crowd in a different kind of way. Everybody was so in tune with what was going on. I mean there was still competition, and it was respected competition, but it was like when so and so would step into the area, you knew it, you know? But at the same time, it didn't feel so ... *celebrity.* Everybody didn't feel so above you. Like they were on the same level with you, but this was what they did. They made paper but they didn't have the entourage and bling ... they dressed the same, but the energy was just different. Especially coming from ... when you think about Raheem and all those cats, South Park Coalition, you could put somebody like Public Enemy in there ... I guess they hit big in the late '80s, early '90s. But I think about like the South Park Coalition and all those cats—they were political and *real* political. I'm gonna have to say they were *way* more political than Public Enemy.

You think?

Man, they were way more political back then. They just all stood up different. When you talk about Raheem and such … after that stuff started to change. It got more lyrical.

He said that it was a real weird time for him because he was the first major label artist from Houston and he was being sent out on tour with Shanice Wilson, Lester Williams, Jeffrey Osborne and he'd go out there doing "Short Shorts," and they just didn't know what to do with him. So he comes back to Houston to regroup and it's becoming a different city.

It was weird because for him and for me because you're coming up where hip-hop is peace, love, understanding and having fun. The ideal four elements of hip-hop. You weren't really now pushing the fact that MCs, DJs, graffiti … Afrika Bambaataa said that hip-hop was a party. Where everybody gets together to get unified, love and just having fun.

So how did you get involved, then? How did you start out?

Well my thing is, you know, I've always been an artist. I found my niche, artistically, in this city. I came up watching my brothers … they'd have these parties at the house. You know, "grown folks" parties. Me, coming from a big family … I'm the youngest of 12, so of course I always … I remember my brothers and sisters talking about going to the skating rink … Rainbow Skating Rink, that a lot of people on this side of town would go to. So I remember my brothers and them having these parties. And of course I would have to be "in bed" by a certain time. But I didn't want to go to sleep, man. I would basically just sneak. I would sneak as far into the room—because we had a big old house—I would sneak as close to the room where the party was going on as I could. Just watching, you know. People. All night. Until I'd get caught. And have to got my room. And by "my room," I mean "our room." But it was just kind of crazy. After that we lived in this house with a garage, and my brothers made this "chill area" where they would come hang out after school, and I remember my little friends that lived next door to me would be like … I was in elementary school, man, and they had all these albums, these funk and soul albums, groups like … like the Ohio Players, or A Taste of Honey, with these women on the cover. Because you're talking about the 1970s when censorship was … you could probably cuss more back then than they can now, without getting shit for it. Censorship wasn't through the roof back then.

So you wanted to create, you wanted to be a part of something like that.

Yeah. Because it was basically me lookin' up to my brothers and stuff. They were into the whole funk, soul scene and they already had the cool names and stuff. My brother Jerry, all his friends called him "Hollywood," like "Yo, Hollywood, what's up?" they called him Hollywood instead of Jerry and stuff. And my other brother was "Black." It didn't have nothin' to do with the fact that he *was* black, that was just his name. And it was this endless scenario where he could be someone *other* than who he was.

And you started doing that for yourself when?

Late '80s … you know, I started breakdancing, the whole graffiti thing … everything fell into place and it was just kind of interesting. Like I said, early on I was always an artist so that came first and I was just like, "Oh, man … look at all these colors and stuff," and it was just wild. I mean that's nuts, dude. So I started doin' a bit of graffiti. I did jackets and hats and stuff for people. As time went along, I mean I was definitely a black guy with two left feet. Not really much of a sportsman, I didn't play basketball, didn't *dance* very well but that didn't matter. But I had real cool Michael Jackson afro and then I saw breakin' … not the movie, but break*dancin'* for the first time and was like, "That's some crazy shit." And I couldn't dance, and I don't know if this makes any sense, but I couldn't dance—but I could *break*dance. You know? So it was like a really weird scenario. So there was that, then the music, sometimes I would end up DJing. Never *really* took DJing 100 percent serious. Breakin' and graffiti were my thing. And then I started *rhyming,* so I started MCing and hosting and stuff and people would always ask me, "Man, you gonna put out an album?" But I was a straight freestyle cat. There's a lot of professional MCs that will tell you that they don't freestyle. If you don't freestyle, you should not mess with the mic no matter who you are. If you're a lyricist, you write lyrics. It's totally different than freestylin'. There's a lot of MCs that have got on the stage to freestyle and rhyme and have choked. That's just not what they do. So eventually, of course, I'm a b-boy. Everybody that's a b-boy, like … Lance Walker, if you're a b-boy, you'd be "B-Boy Lance Walker." That's what all the breakdancers were called. And of course originally that was "Bronx Boy" because breakin' originated in the Bronx but once it got wider, they pretty much changed it from "Bronx Boy" to "Break Boy."

Because of DJ Kool Herc.

Right, which means boys dance to the breaks in the songs.

How is The Bench a culmination of all of those things leading up to now?

The Bench was a representation of all four elements of the culture. And now it's "The Bench Presents," where the name itself is synonymous with hip-hop. It's the culture. The b-boys, our showcasing writer, showcasing DJ and I always have a *live hip-hop act*. And that's the most important part because hip-hop has changed *so* much and outside of Houston you don't realize that hip-hop acts in Houston aren't solely just Paul Walls or your Boss Hoggs or Geto Boys even, for that matter. I don't think groups like South Park Coalition get the recognition that they deserve and they're the foundation of hip-hop here in Houston. They're like pillars. I mean, seriously—there wouldn't be a lot of this shit if it weren't for them.

(2007)

Mike Moe

BELTWAY 8 RECORDS

Founder and owner of Beltway 8 Records, which he shut down in 2008 after 10 years in the business. Beltway 8 was an active beneficiary of the production and distribution deal with Southwest Wholesale that propelled so many Houston labels to success in the 1990s and early 2000s. Mike Moe now operates a restaurant on the Southside featuring his family's recipes, and is a published author.

Straight to it—are you really retiring?

Yep. I spent 10 years in it, and I just realized I need to build a foundation business-wise on my own back—not on an artist's back. Because artists, pretty much, they're fickle. One day they're like this, one day they're like that, I mean … I can't base my future on how another person feels. So I decided to go into two different businesses. One of them is Moe's Family Smoked Ribs and another one, I wrote a book called *Cheat 2 Save Your Marriage.*

What's Moe's Family Ribs? Is that a family recipe?

Well I been cookin' ribs for a long time, and somebody asked me, "Man, you need to sell those." And I had been lookin' for something else to do to get out the music business and the light went off, "You know what? I can sell these ribs!" And that's what I did. I started sellin' ribs and packaging up my family secret sauce, started sellin' them, started catering folks and then people just started ordering up slabs and I bought a pit. I had a big pit custom-made. It's been going pretty good. I haven't opened up an actual *restaurant* yet, but I'm about to buy some property on the main drag on the Northwest side, and hope to have a spot up there.

So it's a Houston recipe? Your family's from Houston?

Yeah they're all from Houston.

Barbecue recipes are different in all parts of Texas.

Yeah—of course, traveling on the road, I done tried 'em all. So I kind of know where I fit at when it comes to my barbecue. But basically it's concentrating on ribs, and I got four or five different sauces.

So do you have anything planned for your sort of going away from music? Are you going to exit music completely, you think?

I don't … I know eventually I wanna come back. I know right now what I really wanna do is kind of consulting and I'll still sell my catalog stuff but the only way I'll come back is … I do it as a hobby and not as a living. I want to do it just for a hobby. I think for the most part my whole reason for gettin' in the business was to help young guys get into business for themselves, whether they be rappers or whatever the case is. It worked out, and then there was ups and downs with it pretty much, but you know after doin' it for so long and then a lot of people didn't just get the idea and the concept. It's like, "Damn, what am I really in this for?"

Do you feel like 10, 11, years ago—did you get into it then as a hobby or did you have that business sense in mind already?

I got into it ... I mean I intentionally got into it as a business. I was laid off in '99 ...

You had like a serious longtime job, right?

Back then I was working at Bettis Actuator Control Valve Company. I was a warehouse manager. I had been there for six, seven years or so. And they laid me off and I took the unemployment money and built a studio and bought a record store.

And that was in Prairie View?

That was in Prairie View.

So were the artists you were working with then located in Prairie View? Obviously some of the artists were in Houston ...

Yeah, for the most part when we was in Prairie View, we was strictly dealin' with the Beltway 8 Boyz. And then ... but we were doing a bunch of production stuff as far as slowed and chopped albums for pretty much everybody in Houston. And so that was kind of my connection. But the Prairie View situation, it was great because I've always been the kind of person ... I like the music industry, but I don't wanna be *in* it. I don't want to be in the fast lane or whatever the case is. I want to run at my pace and Prairie View's kind of like the ideal spot where ... if you come up to Prairie View, that means you wanted to do business. If you didn't come, you wasn't tryin' to do any business. It was kind of out of Houston, you know, 45 miles out of Houston.

Somebody's gotta be serious to come up there and fuck with you.

Yeah, exactly.

Do you feel like there was a certain point when it sort of got out of your hands and you were in the music business?

Yeah, I mean when Southwest Wholesale was open, I was in there maybe four days out of the week, makin' sure ... because I didn't know anything about the music industry, so I had to actually put in more time to understand it fast. Within probably a year, I was really entrenched in a business I knew nothing about.

Which is exactly the way that most everybody comes into it.

It was cool, I mean. I had a smart team around me. So they kind of—I had the things I excelled in and the areas where I was weak, my partner, he picked up on that end. I mean it really worked out.

So as far as getting your stuff into full swing, it took you two years? I mean, that's pretty quick.

When I came into the business, I started makin' money right away. It was kind of like one of those ... I describe it this way: At the time, you had DJ Screw, you had Swishahouse, and it was like the door was closing and right at the last minute, Beltway 8 just kind of squeezed through there. We started putting out albums, and like I said, instantly I started makin' money. So that's why I had to learn so fast, it was like, "Okay, I got some money comin' in ... what do I do?" You say you wanna make money, and then when you start making money, it's like, "Damn, you know, I didn't plan for this ..."

So you didn't plan for it what sense ... "I don't know what to do with all this money?" Or like ... "I don't know how to plan for what's next?"

Well, it was shocking to me at first, if you will. I mean, you think about it, I'm getting $10,000, $18,000 checks a month. And I wasn't used to seein' that kind of money from a job perspective, so next it's like, "What do you do?" One of the most important things I did was to invest money in a record studio, so the studio could continue to make music and the register would continue to make money. Everything else kind of followed. Okay, we need vehicles to travel in, so we get wrapped vans. So everything that was spent was well spent as far as investment-wise. Back then, what we was doing—we was pressin' up our own CDs, so we needed a CD machine, so we did ... I pretty much took the whole "independent" aspect and stretched our company to where the only thing I needed to get from outside sources was print paper. Eventually you end up spending the money.

Everyone talks about Rap-A-Lot as a template for things in Houston, for the way in which a label should be run, but do you feel like that, as time went on, Screw and Swishahouse each ended up becoming their own sort of template?

Swishahouse did a smart thing, and their thing was that they made it an organized business. They went at it and they were successful at it. It's just one of those type things that it worked for them, and I look at it this way: The first great idea's great, but it's always normally the second or third person that comes in and makes that product better. I've heard stories of Screw as far as not wanting to be in the distribution sector, and Swishahouse *did.* And so, okay, well there's a ... "Well, if Screw don't wanna do it, we'll do it." 'Cause Screw music was sellin', and Swishahouse was available. Beltway was available.

I've always thought about this way, too—you look at those three examples, with Rap-A-Lot included, and you have three very different hustles. You have three very successful organizations but they were successful in three very different ways. What do you feel like made Beltway successful in that respect? I mean, you had to have been different than those three ...

Well, one thing we did was we did a survey before we even started makin' the slowed down music, if you will. And a lot of the complaints that we got was, "We don't like the Screw music, it's too slow." Or, "They don't play the whole song—they just play parts of the song and go on to the next one." So, that's what ... we gonna speed up things a little bit, and we gonna play the whole song. So we grabbed that market, and what a lot of people don't know is Beltway 8 was more of a production company, promotion company than anything, than a record company. Because there were times when we were on the road for *months* from here to Canada, and of course our mixtapes got everybody songs on there so at the time we was pretty much just mixin' the *South* South. But we kind of took the Southern market up to Toledo, Ohio, Cleveland, Ohio and all those places ... all there areas in between. So that was our niche. I mean, of course we couldn't compete with Rap-A-Lot. Rap-A-Lot had a big history. Of course. They built the template here, and you honor that system, you honor that template. It's like, "Okay, let me just take a piece of the Rap-A-Lot," or, "Let me just take a piece of Swishahouse," "Let me take a piece of Wreckshop," or, "Lemme take a piece of this ..." You know, you kind of make your own way with it.

You talk about going outside of Houston, venturing outside of Houston—you talk about Ohio and such—how did you reflect on Houston once you began to see the scenes and systems in other cities?

Houston was the mecca. When it came to Southern music, Houston was it. Everybody from out of state—Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, Kansas City, Kansas, Kansas City, Missouri, Omaha, Nebraska, Des Moines, Iowa, I mean all those routes we traveled—they wanted *all* of Houston. I mean they *loved* it. It made me feel good. I remember one time we were at a record store in Kansas City, Missouri—I forgot the name of it ... Seventh Heaven, that's what it was. They had a whole row with nothing but Houston music, you know? It was something you didn't get at home. I mean you know how they say, "At home, you don't get the just due," because everybody knows you. But I remember one time we pulled up in Toledo, Ohio and everybody just going crazy and I was like, "Man, I never seen nothing like this before." You don't know the impact of your music because ... I mean, we're shipping music across the country but we'd never actually seen it from ... a person, hand-to-hand, who wants to buy your music. And then we got home and it was this awesome thing. It gave me a little bit more fire up under your ass to get out there and do it again and let's do it better this time. Because they really appreciated the Southern sound.

Why do you think that Houston developed the way it was? I think there are a lot of ways that people think about it, and certainly being in the industry, you can probably to speak to this, but maybe less so about the generation you're talking about—but the reason that J. Prince started his label is because Houston was ignored for so many years, but I think being off the radar was what forced Houston to develop its own sound, don't you think?

That, of course, and then at the same time, Houston had an independent spirit. It was one of those can-do attitudes where, like you said, J Prince—people didn't respect us, so, "Let's do our own thing, let's build our own foundation." And that's what happened. I mean, we had no one to say thank you to outside of Houston because we did it ourselves. You develop that sense of pride about your city, and of course the music reflected that. I mean, it's one of those situations where you really take each other's sound—and people really loved our sound, so they started mimicking our sound, and that made us even hungrier and more willing to go out and sell our own music. That was one thing about the Houston market, is that we would go get in the car and sell our music. And that was great—you'd go out and make cash and come back home and make more music. It's just a different time of day out here now.

Do you think that the idea of the record label as we know it is gone? We grew up during a time where record labels were important because they found artists, developed artists and curated artists. They are so much less a part of the process now—do you think the idea of the record label as we knew it even 10 years ago is dissolving?

Definitely, and one aspect I believe is that record labels are not developing artists anymore. And pretty much they want you ready to come in and start selling records, and in this case, ringtones or whatever the case may be. Downloads. To me, that takes away the fun of being in the music business. It has turned into a machine. Make the music, put it out, let's see what happens. I went into meetings with distribution companies and they would say, "We don't care *how* many records come in, we're going to push them all out." They didn't care how it sounded or whatever, and I think that was one of the most different things to me, it was like, "Man, they don't even care no more." They just wanted to get the music out there and hope it sticks. Just hope one of them sticks. And that wasn't the way I seen it. That wasn't the way I was brought up in the music business. The artists that are coming up, the young guys, they don't *have* the independent spirit. They want a major deal. And I'm like, "A major deal is cool, you know, for lip service, but at the end of the day you're not going to make your money." An independent artist that really goes out there and works his project, I mean he'll make more money than that guy with the major deal. I've never had a major record, I never had a major deal, and I been in this business 10 years, and lemme tell you, my stomach is fat. And I never chased after a major record deal. At the end of the day, I wouldn't want one no way.

Maybe it's all them ribs.

Man, it was before the ribs. The independent spirit is gone here, and the other thing is that we don't have strong distribution in Houston anymore. We don't have a major record store here and an outlet to sell our music, so we make the music. Understand this: Everybody don't have the hustle to go out and sell CDs on the street corner. Before I did it, I used to sit in the office all day and street teams would go out there and sell it. I didn't know what was going on until one day Southwest Wholesale filed bankruptcy, lost a lot of money.

When was that, 2003?

January 31, 2003. I remember it to this day. I had to go out there and see how to sell CDs, and I loved it. I could sell a CD, get cash right there, and at the same time meet a great bunch of people that enjoyed our music. So you build a rapport with those people, and every time you come back to that city, it's like open arms for you. You can't *buy* that. A major record label can't *give* you that.

When we think about where rap music in Houston comes from, we think about South Park, Fifth Ward, Third Ward—you're from Third Ward, aren't you?

Yeah.

One common theme that you find amongst several of those neighborhoods—these are neighborhoods that, in the geography of Houston, may seem sort of abandoned, ignored. Police stay away, municipalities suck. We're interested in some commentary on those areas. You grew up in Third Ward?

I grew up in Third Ward, Sunnyside, and South Park, and Southwest Houston. When you say "abandoned," I think for the most part I go by this theory: Squeaking wheel gets oiled. If no one's calling in to the city about whatever the problem is in that area, then no one's going to come give you some oil. In those communities, when I lived there, if there was a pothole in the street, that pothole was going to tear up a bunch of tires. We never thought about calling the city to come plug that pothole up, so after a while you just get kind of down into survival. I mean, most times, when you're in Third Ward, South Park, Sunnyside, Southwest—you're in survival mode. So a lot of issues that you would like to see taken care of, I mean, I can't be bothered with that. I gotta figure out how I'm gonna try and eat. Those things come second, third, if that. It's home, regardless of how it looks, it's still home.

You gotta make the best for yourselves in that community, because it's not like the city's giving you any help.

Don't get me wrong, it's nothing against the city, it's just that some things aren't on our radar to fix first. My first thing is to fix the table, with some food on it.

Houston is a series of communities on the outskirts of…nothing, really. Do you think that plays into the music, too?

When I lived in Third Ward, Third Ward was a community. Third Ward was a city. That's why they called it "Third Ward, Texas." And South Park was "South Park, Texas." Southwest was Southwest, you know, Hiram Clarke was Hiram Clarke. Missouri City, Missouri City. For a prime example, Missouri City and Hiram Clarke is one street across from each other, but you wouldn't dare catch someone from Hiram Clarke claim Missouri City, or vice versa. We're in the same city, but at the same time, you claim your part of town as your city. And collectively, you go somewhere outside of Houston, Texas, of course you scream "Houston," because hey—everybody knows Houston. And at the end of the day, regardless of what it is, Third Ward is home to me. I mean, that's what made me the person I am today. So no matter how far I go away from Third Ward, I still have Third Ward in me. In some of my daily routines I have to go through Third Ward. I been getting a haircut at the barbershop in Third Ward for 30 years. There's just certain things, it's like when you go to Third Ward, it's like, "Oh, I'm home!" And don't get me wrong, I've lived on the Southwest all my life also, but Third Ward is where I was *born*, until I was 12-years-old and moved to Sunnyside. Houston is home for everybody, but we're in our city, we don't claim Houston. We claim Fifth Ward, Third Ward, Sunnyside, South Park. That's just it.

It seems like a lot of Third Ward hasn't changed, either. I worked there for years when I first got to Houston and kept a studio there for years. It seems like maybe that's a part of it, too, for Third Ward and maybe the other neighborhoods…

Some things, you know, you don't want to change. I mean, some parts of Third Ward are being split into Midtown now, and I'm the kind of person—I'm for growth—but what I found myself doing one time, I was going around Third Ward just taking pictures of Third Ward before Midtown took over. I know economically, in order for Third Ward to grow, there's gonna have to be some money come in, because there's going to be some opportunity for people in Third Ward to get jobs, but there's certain aspects of Third Ward that some of us don't ever want to change. I mean Jack Yates [High School] is a monument. I dare you to try to change Jack Yates' name to something else. You couldn't *close* Jack Yates. The little guys, back in the days, that's where they came from. Their crews, those streets, that's memory lane for them. So you just can't touch it.

But Fourth Ward is almost completely gone through gentrification … that's part of the commentary, though, how Houston eats itself and destroys its own history. That's sort of what you mean in a way, but I think certain parts of Third Ward and almost all of Fifth Ward, have retained what they had, and in some cases areas haven't even been touched.

I used to tell folks that back in the days when I lived in Third Ward, I called it the "flight of black" from Third Ward, because you lived in Third Ward because economically, it was affordable. And Third Ward was a black community, and it was a *city*, you know, and as you begin to make a little bit more money, you had the opportunity to move to Sunnyside. But you moved to Sunnyside, and if you made a little bit more money, and you didn't own a house in Sunnyside, then you moved to South Park. And then from South Park, if you was lucky, you moved to the Southwest. I remember we moved to the Southwest, man, back in late '70s, early '80s, I thought we were *rich*.

(2010)

Justice Allah

RAPPER · SOUTHSIDE

Justice Allah is an intelligent and powerful voice in the recent movement of politically awakened rap music in Houston alongside K-Rino and Dope E. Since 2010, he has been the host of the "Friday Eve" radio program on Optimo Radio, on which he discusses the New World Order, health, politics and current affairs with radio personality Optimo Ram. He is a member of the group 144 ELiTE along with K-Rino and Ashlei Mayadia.

You had some thoughts on things we're really wanting to touch on for the book, which is ... especially when we talk about bigger things than just the hood, and bigger things than just South Park. We talked about vaccines and that sort of thing ... fluoride being pumped into our drinking water. You had some thoughts on how something like that directly relates to a community like South Park ...

Yeah, that's like what we were talking about earlier. The whole condition of the hood in general is poor. If we was to get a checkup, it would just really be a poor grade because there's no type of health education goin' on, and then the very little education that people do have in regards to, you know, general eatin' habits and exercise and, you know, they knowledge of medicines and doctor's visits. And the whole health care industry in general is so small that most people don't even bother with it. We lead the numbers in all of the bad statistics, you know, the heart disease, the high blood pressure, all the cancers. There's just nothing really in the neighborhood to make it convenient to have good health. It's not a good food supply in the neighborhood. It's mostly just fast food, fried chicken and burgers, and it's just like they turned that chicken into our number one enemy. You can't go to a neighborhood, an urban area, whatever, and not, you know, have five or six chicken places that specialize in serving just fried chicken only! You can't even get it any kind of form, you know—just fried. With fries, and a side of rice and fried biscuits and fried everything. Then, it's so cheap that it makes it real feasible to go and buy this fried food rather than just make groceries, because, you know, the groceries cost more than just paying $2.99, or in some cases just $1.99 and getting what's perceived to be a whole meal. If people would ever analyze, there's no way possible that they can give you a whole meal for $1.99, or $2.99 like that when you can't go to the grocery store and do it. How can they possibly do it? And then, you mix that in with, you know, just not having the top notch foods. There's only one or two grocery stores—if that many—in the average black or Hispanic community, which is known as the hood. In most cases, there's just one grocery store, and if you're not close to it, then you're forced to do business, like most people, at the corner store—what they call the convenience store—and there's one on almost every other corner where they can go in and, you know, rather than buy green-leafed vegetables, you can just, you know, buy chips and noodle ramens they're sellin' where you can just eat that air and basically chemicals and stuff and kill your body up, man. Even when you look at these noodles you think it would say just "noodles" on the back or something, but they have 25 different ingredients just to make up a pack of noodle ramens, man, and it's one of the staples of the neighborhood. One of the main things people eat—noodles and chips and cereal. And little tidbits just to get 'em by.

Even the real food that's there is just starch.

Yeah. Just straight carbohydrates ... *if* that much. I've been doing research on chicken, seeing that it's not even chicken anymore. They pump it up 30 percent with water and then fill in the rest of it with pork powders to try to hold it together. So wherever you go, you're getting poisons with the fast food places. There's little beef, if any, in the burgers, and you compound that with there being a liquor store on every corner ... not literally, but figuratively ... you know, per capita, I'm pretty sure that there's more liquor stores in the neighborhoods than there is in any other community environment. You know, in most communities, they zoning laws and stuff against that. But, like I said, not in the neighborhood, the so-called hood. You know, fast food place, convenience store, liquor store ... they all go hand in hand, and the health is bad. Most people just ... doin' very little exercise and, you know, it's just a deadly combination when you're putting that garbage in your body and not doin' anything to maintain or exercise your muscles and organs. It's just a death trap, man, and most people end up with diseases before they 40-years-old that end up killin' them before they're 50. If they make it over 50, it's just a few years, you know. I don't know what the actual life expectancy is, but I'm hearing more and more of people just dying out now at 40, and 50, and just recently one of my rap colleagues died at 30-years-old, man. It was sad, you know? Heavy D ... and Erick Sermon had a heart attack ... it's just sad, people not being aware. But you *should* be aware of your health, you know? It's all good when it's good, but when it go bad, it's already too late, damn near.

Yeah, because people think if there's no alarms going off, then everything must be fine. "I drink the way that I do and I smoke the way that I do and I feel fine, so be it." But that stuff takes a long time to show up in the way that you feel it ... trying to deal with those poisons being inside of you that your body doesn't know how to process.

Yeah. It can't process it, because it's unnatural, and your body is a natural organism that has no way of dealing with these toxins, and foreign substances, you know. It's just not equipped. There's nothing to put inside the body to deal with these chemicals and stuff that mankind has put together in just an effort to save money, and maybe a more concerted effort to just kill more people off. When you look at the health care system, man, it's not real geared towards *cures*. It's more geared towards treatments, and there's not a cure for anything. There's only treatments that help you to deal with the suffering or the diseases. Mainly just pain suppressants and stuff like that, and nothing really geared towards helping your health. Your health is really controlled by the intake that you put in your body, and not the *disease* itself. You wouldn't get these diseases, and nobody would have them, if we just ate the right foods and avoided the toxins. You know, we're not born with these diseases like they try to fool us into thinking. When you go to the doctor and they have you fill out all this paperwork, and the main part of the paperwork is your family medical history. They wanna know, "Did your grandmother have this, did your mother have that, your father ..." As soon as you check the box that says "yes," then they just simply go back and tell you, "Yeah, it's hereditary!" And that's the reason that you have it, is because *they* had it. And I mean, if you wouldn't have checked the box then they wouldn't have been able to go to that conclusion, and even if it *is* the same disease that your grandfather or your mother and father had, you might wanna just *analyze*. Are you two people exercising the same eating habits? Are you eating bad foods and goin' through a bad life experience, not getting the proper amount of exercise and the balanced diet that your parents didn't do? Most times, we just follow what we was trained! If we grew up in a house eating starches and not drinkin' the proper amount of water or getting the right vitamins in, then we're gonna really maintain that same status quo in our homes… you know, it's just going to keep on propagating throughout our generations, and it's going to keep looking like these diseases are hereditary, when the only thing that's hereditary is the habits. The bad habits.

And there seems to be that so many of the things that are available feed bad habits. I mean, you think about the sugary snacks, sugary candy and everything like that that's right up front in the stores, and then the alcohol, cigarettes, all that kind of stuff. These are all habitually addictive things that bring people back that take away from the person… the intake doesn't fuel the person's being.

I know personally the makers of these products you don't *see* other places. They're geared for the neighborhood, and I'm speaking of all these energy drinks, they probably got about seven or eight different brands of energy drink out with more and more chemicals in them besides just caffeine. But then you have the other drinks that's real popular here now, the so-called *slow-down* drinks, the simulated promethazine and simulated syrup drinks that's really geared towards getting the children on this stuff so they can experience what it feels like and then graduate towards the real drug. You know, they call it "Sippin Syrup," and one is called "Purple Stuff" and "slowdown." They got all kind of fancy names for it.

I think part of it in Houston with drank, codeine, is that it's never really been stigmatized in ways, even like smoking weed. It seems to be such a natural thing. That's not necessarily a good thing when you're talking about kids and you're talking about a product that they can have available to them when they're young. Maybe that is a "natural" thing and maybe it's not demonized within their family, but it's still too young for them to be partaking in even a fake drug.

Yep. It's just a training program. So they can imitate what they hear and what they're seeing about it. And people think codeine is safe. They think that, you know, this is safe, and it's a fruity, fun type of drug, but they don't understand what happens to they bodies once codeine is processed through the liver and everything. It turns into heroin, and it's the same effects, you know, because it's from the heroin family. That's why they have that ending of i-n-e, just like all the derivatives of heroin do. It's highly addictive. People are not just doing it for fun. It starts out as a certain thing, but then it ends up bein' something that you have to go through withdrawals and everything to try to get off of it. And most people just supplement with different type of pills, with alcohol and more drugs and weed or whatever else they can supplement they desires for that drug for. It's definitely not a joke, and you'd think after all these years, and after all the major Houston rap artists and other people that have *died* from it, somebody would finally stand up and finally say, "Hey, man, this stuff here is a *drug!*" It's not just a fruity drink that you po'ing it up in sodas and stuff. It is killing people, it got 'em strung out, got 'em stealin' and really incapacitated. Shuttin'… shuttin' down their kidneys and all the kind of different things it does to your organs. You know, and nobody's speakin' on it. Nobody's speakin' *against* it. It's just a fun, "reppin' in H-Town" type of drug.

Well part of that rationale is that you can't overdose on codeine. You just can't drink enough of it, you can't process enough of it to take you to that limit [in one sitting], but the problem with that argument is that when somebody is using over and over and over again and they're having their bodies have to process that all of the time, it slows down their metabolism and starts messing with other systems in their bodies. And like you said, for so many people, it's a cocktail, and so they're drinking codeine and they're smoking Sherm, which is a hallucinogen, so you've got all of this stuff going on in your body at the same time. It's wearing people down.

Yep. All the different chemicals, man. That's where they come with the examination and tell you about your chemical imbalance. And that's what we're really doing to ourselves, is imbalancing ourselves chemically when we start taking in all these different type of, you know, whether it's drugs or it's food, it's still the same chemicals now. You turn it on the back, you can't even pronounce some of this stuff that's on the face of a gum wrapper or something. I mean, it's no different to *me* than somebody cookin' up some crack or something in the lab. You still don't know what the ingredients is, and you can't say a 100 percent what effect it's gonna have on each individual. You know, we're not like cars or boats or machines where we can just take this cog off and replace it with another and it's gonna run the same. We're all individually tuned and different. The makeup is different. Despite being the same species, we're all different, and it's just hard to say what one thing will do to one person and what it'll do for another. But in the neighborhood, the awareness level is just... it's way, way down. It's to a point it's so far down that it's taboo to even talk about this stuff. Myself, I stopped eatin' meat thanks to the help of K-Rino and Dope E. educating me on what this processed meat was doin' to me and what that really was. And, you know, it's taboo for me to talk about this kind of stuff. It's always a stigma behind it, and people just can't understand it to the point where they don't even wanna hear about it.

I think they'd just rather not believe it. It's about their options. They know the stores they go to in the neighborhood and they know what's on those shelves. And they know that basically that if they wanted to make a big change in their lives, it would have to involve a lot more than just the hood, you know? It would be a huge step for a lot of people, and it's unfortunate that a lot of people have that in the back of their minds.

It's just fear of the unknown. People who don't have any type of idea of what the alternative *would* be. Because there's nothing else presented. It's just like the health issue goes across the board. More prevalent than the physical health is the mental health and everything that's tied in with that also. It's not just the bad food. It's the environment. The stress and just everything involved with living in a situation where you're just not number one on the list of priorities. It wears you down, so the general consensus for the health in the hood is... on a scale from one to five, I would say we're close to being on one. Trying to *work* our way to one. It's just... it's poor. You know, we need more awareness, and we need somebody that people in the neighborhood *respect*... any one of these athletes or one of the... I hate to keep puttin' it on entertainers and stuff because it's such a petty feeling of work, to keep puttin' all the pressure and blame on for uplifting people and makin' people do the right thing. There's way too much credit given to entertainers, and way too much emphasis put on they opinions and what they do. But, unfortunately, we gonna have to use these entertainers or use the athletes and people that, you know, can be looked upon as "prestigious" by the people in the neighborhood, and somebody amongst them gonna have to speak out against this stuff and be an example, you know? Be an example. Be an example of the guy that says, "Hey, look at me—I'm rich and I got this and I got that and one thing I don't do is I don't abuse my health," you know? "I'm rich. I do this and that and I don't *sip* syrup, man. I know syrup is heroin, man." And just *say* it, you know? If people speak, eventually, future generations will know the truth, and they can make a decision if they wanna try it or not. Based on the truth. Some people might wanna try heroin. It's no big deal. They just didn't wanna shoot up. It's the same thing, but you're shootin' up with that white cup.

Do you think for a lot of people, that the prestige you were talking about, the idea of prestige that's based on people's perception of someone, distills down just to how much money somebody has?

Well, unfortunately, it does. It shouldn't, because I know some pretty prestigious people that don't have a lot of money—people that I have way more respect for than people that I know have money. But in the general consensus that the public has, it's all based on financials and objects that they can *see*. You know, they can't see into the heart of a man, and they don't know all his good accomplishments because they don't *recognize* his good accomplishments. They just keep a record of everything he done bad. So they base a person's worth on what they can actually see with they eyes. "Okay, this guy's got a Bentley, this guy dress in $5–600 suits, his jewelry and all this, your women." You know, they associate that with being successful and somehow bein' smart and bein' powerful. You don't have material objects and financial wealth. So, unfortunately, it's the wrong assertation to have, but human nature tends to lead people towards the celebrity, and you're not really a celebrity if you don't have money. And that's the way people feel, man. Even the celebrities who get to that status without having money, they end up gettin' money once they get to that level. And for all the people that sneak their way into celebrityhood, they end up with money, and bein' set apart from the rest of society. So people really look towards that, you know, and judgin' you by it. A lot of people might have respect for what you do, or they might look up to you as an artist or athlete or whatever you have to say, but at the end of the day, don't consider you to be prestigious because you don't have any money. You just another guy.

What about the things that really compound this, too? We talk about vaccinations, flu shots, that sort of thing, things that are introduced in the hood that you don't see introduced in River Oaks, and in the Montrose, white neighborhoods ...

The neighborhoods is mainly controlled by fear. Everybody would hate to admit it, but that's the main emotion that's goin' through most people's minds that live in the neighborhood is fear. You know, they scared of the police, they scared of the government, they scared of what's gonna happen if they don't maintain they jobs or whatever they do for income. They scared of crime. You know, it's just a lot of fear goin' around, so most of this stuff is forced on us. You don't get your child immunized, then they're not gonna be able to attend school. If they not able to attend school, then the police is gonna come and get you. After a certain amount of time, you're gonna be in trouble and end up dealin' with that. And plus, your child gonna miss the opportunity to go to school, and be able to do their job and be a productive citizen. So it's all based on fear—something somebody said you have to do, and if you don't do it, then there's gonna be a consequence—a negative consequence—to you. And in neighborhoods, most people know. They've lived their whole life goin' through negative consequences, and they're gonna try to avoid it if at all possible. According to what people feel, the neighborhood is a place that's crime-ridden, everybody just swabbed out, it's a concrete jungle they call it, and people do whatever. But I've lived in the neighborhood most of my life and I can tell you the people there, mostly all the people, follow the rules, man, and they do what they're told, and they productive citizens because they know what the alternatives gonna be. They live in *fear* of breaking the rules, and it's misconstrued that these are people that are not following the rules, and they're one of the only groups of people that *is* followin' all the rules. They're still being victimized with the forced immunizations and all the thoughts of, "You can go to the doctor and get a medicine, a pill or something, that's gonna cure your ailments," and all it does is cause you more ailments. More side effects that end up doing you in faster than the disease that you went to get treatment for.

And then you've got, on the other end of it, you talk about how people who do follow the rules and how people are trying to lead productive lives, and that's because the reality is a lot of those people know intimately, have a friend or a loved one or family member who has gone to prison, been locked up, and so that's something that hangs over the heads of everyone. It's almost like a correlative industry with what we're talking about—things that lead you to crime and then the prison industrial complex just waiting right there. It's a business.

Yeah. It's all a design. I'm not gonna say *most* of it—*all* of it is a design. Just like cause and effect. You know, you put poor health, bad education, poor mental health, lack of knowledge out, lack of job opportunities, poor economy, and just a general consensus of not caring about a group of people, and the rest is very natural. You know, you can just put it out there.

You put the drugs right there in the mix, you put the guns right out there in the mix, the alcohol out in the mix, and you take everything else but that element away, and naturally you know crime's gonna exist. So you'll be able to go in and lock people up every day. It's an open pool that they've got to keep up. It's not a day that the police don't go into the neighborhood and fish people out. Each individual officer goes into the neighborhood. There's not one day that an individual officer is not able to fish somebody out and take them to jail. That leads us to believe that the whole neighborhood, the whole community is full of nothing but criminals, and that can't be the case, because how could it *exist*? How could it be going on this strong, this long, each individual neighborhood and community, if it was full of nothing but criminals like that? It would be total anarchy. It's just ridiculous, man. I went online and saw that the Correctional Corporation of America, one of the leading providers of prison facilities in America, is headed by Dick Cheney. They sellin' they shares for $10.42 a share last time I checked. That's how much these people payin' to keep folks locked up—$10.42. It might have went up or down since that time, but it's okay. It's so trivial. But that's what you really payin' for, the worth of a human being, just to make sure this system keeps going—$10.42. Each time you buy your share, you guarantee that you're going to get another prison built, and keep more and more people locked up. Around the world, man, this country leadin'... I mean, other nations throughout the world, in prison populations... it's ridiculous... more black men locked up in prison right now than ever was involved in the whole slave trade! The height of it, in the 1830s and stuff. Now, you know, it's the same thing. You locked up, you don't have any rights. Your Thirteenth Amendment right is refused when you're convicted of a felony and locked up like that. So, you're not even a free individual. You're back in slavery again. And they say now that the numbers is even higher than they was when there was *actually* slavery. So what's that tell us about how far we've advanced as a nation, and all the freedoms and everything that we go and fight wars for other people about, when you've got this segment of your own population that's not even free citizens of your country? You're lockin' them up for $10.42 a share, so the stockholders and the chairmen and CEOs can get rich off of making sure that human beings stay behind bars and live like animals. There's just so many different things. I mean, even with the youth, they got so many different ordinances and laws they've passed now. Curfew violations and truancies and, you know, all kind of different things that we shouldn't be doing. They do the same things that I did or my father done or somebody else would do in school. Played hooky or kissin' a girl or somethin'—now you're convicted for sexual assault for that. So you end up with a record. Then you have to deal with deferred adjudication and stuff that you have to have expunged from your record. It takes years if you *can* get it expunged. Most cases, it won't come off, and you end up with a record before you even get out of school, and it's just a stairstep thing. Once you get convicted, the court system looks at that and they quickly convict you for the next, add on to the sentencing, and get you more time, and a more lengthy, felonious record.

They use it for a base—a basis for everything else. Anything to get you on the books.

Yeah. You're worthless out here, man, you know. I used to myself... I worked with the Houston Independent School District for 13, 14 years. I was doing $3 million, $4 million budgets every quarter, balancing everything off, but then I ended up gettin' myself into some trouble, and once that happened, it was over, you know? It was over for me. I was convicted, never ever been to prison, never even had a felony, but it's just enough to where I'm unemployable. And it's turned into a lifetime sentence now. Something that happened 15, 12 years ago has changed into a lifetime sentence for me. You know, and I could be a weak person, like most of the people are, and say, "Well, you know, I can't be employed... or I can't be adequately employed, so maybe I can turn to sellin' drugs or doin' crime in order to supplement my income." It just so happens that I'm not that weak as a person, and I know other ways about gettin' money, but that's not to say that I'm greater than anybody else, because another person is gonna go to what *they* know how to do to get money ... so maybe they would be smarter than I am. But needless to say, the prison industrial system is waiting on both of us to slip and fall, and still be sold on the US Mercantile Stock Exchange for $10.42 a share, no matter what crime we committed—rape, drug dealin', simple theft, or whatever. It's still the same amount of money, and a lot of times no disparagement in the sentencing. Just keeping you locked up so the averageperson, they're generating $600 a day for these prison systems, man. Just the amount of money that the federal and state and municipality governments pay to keep these people locked up. Averages out to about $600 a day to pay the corrections officers and all these people to watch them, the health people and employ all the people involved in this system. You gotta keep people locked up now because somebody's gotta feed the system.

It's a business.

It's an industry.

(2011)

Meshah Hawkins

THIRD WARD

Meshah has been close to the world of the Screwed Up Click since high school, when she attended Jack Yates along with SUC rappers Big Pokey and Big Moe in the early '90s as the popularity of Screw's music began to unfold. She would later become the longtime girlfriend of the rapper Hawk, also known as Big Hawk, and the two were married in April of 2006. Hawk was Fat Pat's older brother and a universally adored rapper in Houston who had started rapping later than Pat but became known as the "Five Star General" of the SUC. He was regarded by other artists as a leader, especially during the period in which the Northside and Southside were warring in the 1990s, and was known by everyone as a family man with no known adversaries. He was murdered on May 1, 2006 in South Park when going to a friend's house to play dominoes, less than a month after he and Meshah had married. In the aftermath of his death, Meshah became a prominent voice in Houston's rap community, and still maintains Hawk's recorded catalog through Ghetto Dreams Entertainment while leading the effort to find his killer. She is the mother of Hawk's two young sons.

You've got Ghetto Dreams Entertainment going still on some level, right?

Yes I do.

Are you still releasing records?

Well, I did release, you know, an album, after [Hawk] passed, and then I haven't put out any new projects since then. But I've just been distributing his old music, and I created a logo and some shirts and everything, so, you know, some merchandise. So I've just been kind of distributing that, and online, digital.

It's important that there's a home for his records and that sort of thing, somewhere where people can go and they know they can connect with the legacy.

Right, right, right, right, and that's basically what I'm trying to do. I can't just sit up here and *not* sell it at all, you know. He made it for everyone. He made it for the people, so I want it to be out there, definitely. As much as I can, you know. It's hard, with all of this different... you know, the distribution, the games that's goin' on right now. It's just really hard. This region, too, you know.

But people are still reaching out, people are still buying his records and still... people are still listening.

Yeah, still selling. Still selling.

So what's the status of the case at this point?

You know what, I haven't spoken to the... I think the last time I spoke with someone was last October. I had called Crime Stoppers just to, you know, kind of check in with them, because I do have a reward *still* up with them. As far as I know, the case is still closed. The detective told me that there aren't any new leads, so, basically that's why they closed the case. But he said if something came *up* of course they would reopen it. But nothing has came... no new leads have came up, you know. Nothing has came up, so it's just been closed at this point. But with me having the reward with Crime Stoppers, I'm able to do publicity through *them.* As far as like the press conferences, you know, stuff like that, on an annual basis and stuff. And so I did a few of them a couple of years ago but I haven't done any, you know, here lately.

Does it sort of... incentify it for HPD when they know that there's a reward attached to it, to apply more resources to the case, or does that have nothing to do with them?

Well, you know what? I think that they kinda work together. I think that some of the Crime Stoppers people and the... I think they work together in some type of way, so I think it just helps like if you contribute to their association, then they're able to use their connections and everything to try to get the best people on the *job*, you know, keep the people on the *job* or whatever. I mean, I don't really know *how* it works, really.

It's gotta be really complicated on that end, right?

Really complicated, because when this all happened, I thought that, you know, from looking at *CSI* and all these different shows, I mean, you feel like the process is very sophisticated. Like they're able to detect all these different things. So I really left the job in their hands just thinkin' that, "Okay, well they're going to be able to detect where the bullet came from and trace it back to the gun and all these different things." So I'm thinkin', "Okay, eventually they're gonna figure this out." And so, you know, just the whole thing, the whole process is just like, "Okay, is this really real, because this is not what I'm seein' on TV." I've never been through this in real life, so I don't know what to expect, you know? I was just really in the dark about a lot of things, you know, and it's scary. It's been a scary, scary, scary experience for me because I don't know who would want to hurt him. He was just really a peaceful person. He never had any beef with anyone, so I don't know who would want to hurt him. So then it makes me fearful, you know, for like if there's some type of vindictive... because the only theory has been like behind some type of money or control of the music maybe. You know, by some of his old business partners or something like that. But, I mean... because that's always—you look at music business history, you know? I mean I even saw a movie where they depicted the same kind of... the same situation kind of, you know, but it was all behind the company wanted control. So, you know, it just leads me to that. Because he was so peaceful, it leads me to that. And he was always at home with me and the kids! It was like... it was really a job for him. Like he would go out and work and come home. Work and come home. He was able to separate the two things.

He had a regular job before he ever rapped, didn't he? Didn't he work at an insurance company or something like that?

Yes! He was at American General for 10 years. And when DEA [Dead End Alliance] came out, all of that, he was working at American General. He was one of the only guys doing that. All these guys was out here just partying, going out of control. But he would get up... he would be with them, all night, and he would get up and go to work. And he would come home and do it all over again. I don't know how he did that. I don't know how he did it, but he did. He did. He got up every morning and went to work.

So did it kind of sneak up—because he was the older brother, he was older than Pat, right?

Right, right.

But he started rapping after Pat.

Yep. Him and Pat... you know, siblings are always in competition. So Pat come home, *he* raps. Hawk was like, "Nah, nah, you sound good, you sound good, but I can rap, too." Of course they competin'! [*laughs*] Hawk really... I think he was more of a gifted *writer*... you know, just some things he's written to me, and I have just books and books and books of all his lyrics and tablets, and I just really feel like he was a gifted writer, and I used to tell him that all the time and I used to encourage him to write for other people, write for other rappers and everything. Because he was really, really a gifted writer.

Was this before he was actually rapping that he was doing a lot of writing?

Yeah! He used to write all kind of poetry and, you know, he could just write a letter to you and it would just be *so* endearing, you know?

Just from the heart.

Yes, yes. The words he would use. And he wasn't *afraid* to show that side. He showed that side to everybody. He wasn't afraid to show that side to people.

What's your personal relationship to music? From your perspective?

You know, it's really been something for me, because it's been *such* a big part of my life. Because I grew up *in* Third Ward, and I've always been, you know, just ... my *mom* was married to a musician, so it's like my mom had kinda ... I always grew up in music, around music. Different genres of music. So it was only natural for me to gravitate toward somebody that was in that career. Because of my love for music. And then, so I grew up in Third Ward and then I went to Yates, and the culture ... it started *there*, you know, the creativity, like Moe would be singing in the hallway.

Wow.

And then Pokey played football at that time, but like [we were with] one of the first DJs [that] was doin' all of our parties that started slowin' down records, too. His name was Michael Price. He got killed.

I remember that.

Yeah. Pretty early. But he was one of the first, first ones to actually slow down the record—like he had a screw in the radio, and it made the tape go slow. And so that kind of made him come up with the concept, but Screw actually took it to another level. Michael Price wasn't doin' it nowhere near—he had like stumbled upon puttin' the screw in the radio. Screw actually started ... got the tempo, he did everything. He created everything basically. I graduated in '93. Pokey and them were in '94. They were in the year behind me. My year, we went to the state championship in football, and so every game—and this was like right, you know, this was all around like the birth of hip-hop I guess here in Houston, you know what I'm sayin'? It was like all durin' that time, everything, the events, everything just got blown up because it was like we had this new music that was creating and forming here, so it was like everybody gravitated to these certain places, these different events. Like they talk about the Slab Holiday, with the Kappa Beach Party, Memorial Day Weekend beach party. And see, Yates would always—every football game it was like a slab fest in front of the school. You know, it would last for *hours* [*laughs*]. And it would just be crazy, and I was just like a little teenie bopper. And then we started sayin' "boppin'." It was like all of the words we started sayin', the whole slang, it just ... all the guys started ... you know, Pat invented a lot of those words with the slang, him and Keke. "Raising the roof," you know, "throwed." All that. That's Pat! They started sayin' the words, Keke with that "Peanut Butter & Jelly," and you know, "pancake." They just invented all this stuff. It was around the cars. Pat had a love for cars. I mean, he just *loved* cars ever since [he was] a *child*. And he would build model cars. So he started just like ... gettin' all these different slabs, and then Third Ward had *they* set of slabs, South Park had *they* set of slabs ... Fourth Ward had *their* set of slabs. And they would all ride in the line [*laughs*] at all the different events. It was just ... it was just so much *fun*. Oh my god, it was like we *had* to be there. It was like you was dyin' to get to the beach or wherever the event was, and it brought everybody together. Everybody together at that time.

It was the music bringing people together.

It was the music, yeah. It was like Screw was blowin' up ... it really was like ... at first it started with the slabs, because there was like Rap-A-Lot ... of course, they were the first ones, kind of on the Houston scene. So it started with the slabs, Rap-A-Lot, and then there was ... you know, we had our little separate music scene ... it was Big Mello, Rap-A-Lot, Big Mike, Wickett Crickett ... I mean, you know, we had all that goin', right? And so then they started with the slab cars, with the slab cars with the bass, the music, right? And so *then*, you know, the guys [Screwed Up Click] still wasn't together then. They *knew* each other, but you know, we still really hadn't bonded. So then when all the guys started goin' to *Screw* house, and when the *Screw* music hit the scene, then everybody just started gettin' together, you know what I'm sayin'? All the people together. Because everybody wanted to be at events to *hear* the *music*, to hear the Screw tapes, like the people from the Northside—*they* couldn't get the Screw tapes, really, so at the events, they would just sit there. We were just like parked and all of the cars would be out there, and you would hear the new Screw. You know, because all the slabs—see, you can't ride slab and not bang the Screw, you know what I'm sayin'? You not ridin' slab if you ain't bangin' Screw. It just goes hand in hand. You can't do one without the other. You ain't holdin'. That's what Pat would say, "You ain't holdin', you ain't comin' down if you ain't jammin' Screw!" [*laughs*]

Well, and that was the way to hear Screw, too. You listened to Screw in a car. Not only was that the way to listen to him, but it was kinda the only way, because you didn't hear it on the radio, you didn't hear it in the clubs. People played it in their cars. That's where you heard it.

They played it in their cars, that's right. That's right. You would go right to those places where you know those cars gon' be just to hear it. See the cars, hear the music, you know, then it just started the culture. Everybody started raisin' the roof and ... you know, I wasn't even a ... me and my girls ... two of my girls ... we wasn't, you know, sippin' syrup and doin' all of that. We just ... you know, we were part of the culture. That was our culture. We were right there. We growin' up with these guys, these are our friends. Basically. We're just seeing them branch off and do different things. Next thing you know, they're superstars, you know?

Do you remember the beginnings of that—when Screw was doing his tapes early on, he was doing regular speed mixtapes and then he started slowing down stuff and then it was still a little while before he started having those guys come and freestyle on the tapes. Do you remember that, when that started?

Yeah, it started ... okay, like C-Note, Courtney of the Botany Boyz, he was actually the first one who started. And so like they got into music because they have ... the Botany Boyz is C-Note, Will ...

D-Red.

Will-Lean, D-Red, right. But Will's father is actually ... was in an old singing group back in the day, and they had put out an album. It was a popular album around here. So, you know, Will grew up in music, too. And so his cousin can sing really well and somebody else in his family—both of his cousins have *beautiful* voices. They can sing. So that's them singin' on a lot of those old Botany Boyz songs and everything. So they—so he grew up around that, too. And so they started, you know, there was some ... I don't wanna talk about all the other stuff that was goin' on! [*laughs*] Because you know there was some wrongdoing as well, but I don't wanna talk about all of that ...

It's all good.

But, but they started like that, and so Courtney actually—C-Note—went over there, he flowed on the Screw tape, and so then, you know, him and Pat, all of them was from the ... they all hung out together. So then Pat heard it, Pat *ran* over there, and he flowed, so it was like Courtney first, Pat second. And so then everybody else started coming in. Coming in doing the freestyles and everything.

It just kind of blew up after that huh?

Right. Screw was just really a DJ, you know. He did some little local clubs and stuff. He just did different gigs, you know, and it grew from there. He did different gigs and then him and—I don't know how he listened to the ... I don't know how he actually came up with the concept. I think him and Michael Price had kinda hooked up together, or either him and Darryl Scott.

I know he learned some of it from Darryl Scott.

I know 'cause ... Darryl Scott was really one of the originators of the mixtape here. He had it sewed up. He was the only person here doin' mixtapes, and his mixtapes were *legendary.* Everybody really loved his mixtapes, and he would—I believe he would slow it down a couple of octaves ...

I think he would do like a couple of slowed songs on a tape, but he never did a full slowed tape like Screw did, and never with the chopping and screwing at the same time.

Right, right. So then Michael Price was Darryl Scott's protégé. When Michael Price died, then *Screw* I guess, you know, got with him and *he* started—he just took it to another level. Nobody could do what Screw did. Nobody. I mean even to this day, you know, I've traveled after I put out the album and I would run into different DJs and things from different places all over the world and they would say to me that, to this day, they haven't ran across a DJ that could cut as sharp, you know, as he could, and that was one of the compliments that somebody told me … I wish I could quote him, but he … that stuck with me. And they were like, "Man, he was *cold*." And they would give him a lot of respect for how he created that music. And it took him a lot of work! That's what really killed him. You know, I've seen him over there. It was just really … whew! People don't understand. The guy, he would not sleep! He would not sleep. I would go over there and I would just be like, "*Wow* …"

Fall asleep on the turntables.

Yeah! There would just be crates all over. Did you get a chance to go over there?

No, I didn't. We started the project in 2004, so he was already gone by that time. Did you go over there a lot?

Well, I went over there enough [*laughs*]. I went from a child … I remember goin' when he lived with his Dad, I don't know what street it was on, in Southeast Houston, with the gate in the front …

Greenstone.

When the line would be down the street. Okay, we would just ride by there, because we would see all the guys, you know? We were tryin' to see all the guys, so we would just drive through there, and then we would go get our tapes from *there* and then I remember when he was in the … the next time I went to his house—went over there a couple of times as a child, and then the next time I went when he was out in Missouri City.

I know they got kicked out of a bunch of places.

When I went to *that* house … I went out to that house several times, and it was just … oh gosh … it would be all night! He would literally … he would be in there for *days* workin' on something. And he would not sleep! We'd be over there—we wouldn't get over there until about three! In the morning! And he'd just be goin'. He'd just be goin', goin', goin'. I said, "Oh gosh … this dude … this dude here …" I mean, you'd just be like, "What can I do for you?" We'd be sittin' there, you know, and come over there to entertain him or just to hang out with him or whatever, but he could not—he would just be workin' the whole time. He'd be runnin' from room to room, putting albums on from different crates. He'd be lookin' through his different crates, you know, and he'd just be goin' from—we'd be sittin' there chillin', and then he'll get an inspiration, he'll just take off and go in another room and he'd be lookin' through some crate, and he'll come back and he'll put somethin' on, and we'll be, "Yeah!" And we'll start talkin' and this, this and that, and he'd be gone. He got the headphones on, he over here doin' this and he … I mean, *he worked himself to death*. He worked himself to death. I wanted to step in and help him so bad. I was like, "Well, who am I?" But I really wanted to step in and help him. Him and Hawk, too, because they really just did not know the *business* side. You know, a lot of the guys got into it that, unfortunately, used to sell drugs and so they just put that business savvy over to the music game basically.

Which really works for some people.

Yeah! It does, it works for some people, but it doesn't work on a large scale, you know what I'm sayin'? If you want to be mainstream—if you really wanna make it and you wanna be mainstream and really have a celebrity status, you know, like the Paul Walls and the Chamillionaires did, then you can't go that route. You gotta really have something reputable, you've gotta have some reputable business people workin with you …

Gotta clean your money up.

Right. You know, go through the proper channels, and hire an attorney and publicist and this and that.

Basically not *you* doin' everything. And so they were really self-taught. You know, they had—they went through a lot of different experiences where they got *screwed*, and they just kept gettin' screwed through different experiences, and some of them took it like, "Okay, it's a learning thing. I can flip this, I can do this." But some of them got bitter. And then it's just start ... goin' off from there. Some people were makin' money, some people were not. Screw was makin' money off of the guys' tapes—he was sellin' the guys' tapes, but the guys wasn't necessarily makin' any money off of the Screw tapes, you know what I'm sayin'?

Right.

So that's what happened, and that's the difference between ... the guys, that's what kind of led them to break apart. Because they were not makin' any money off of the Screw tapes, or anything like that that they were makin', so they had to go out and get other deals, and do other stuff on their *own*, and work with other people. Whereas, Swishahouse would allow their people that did the mixtapes, Slim Thug and them, they would allow them to make some money off of their tapes. So ... they were not organized, I guess, you know, at first. And so it just kind of got a bitter ... it just didn't turn out, I guess, the way it was supposed to turn—everything didn't turn out.

It sort of snuck up on everybody, too, the whole success of it.

It did. It really did. It really did, and Screw—I say, "Hawk, why Screw don't just have his label, have all y'all on his label, and ... you know, why he just not doin' that?" So I would sit down and talk to Hawk all the time about this, and he's like, "Babe, Screw really wanna be a DJ. He don't really wanna have his own ... get into, you know, runnin' a company and this and that. He still wanna be able to make his tapes and do his music and this and that ... he really don't wanna have a record *label.* He really just kinda wanna DJ." And I was like, "Well, you know, he can DJ. Somebody just run it for him." So, basically ... because I was in college at the time, and I was, "Okay, maybe I can go into this as a *career.*"

Run a label.

I know all of the—I mean, I grew up with all of them, so it was like ... I wanted to see everybody make it. I really didn't ... I mean, I thought it was really fascinating that what had came out of the culture, just from us kickin' it, hangin' ... you know what I'm sayin'? Hangin' out and kickin' it, to see the *talent.* Because we had made a business, we had did this ... we had this whole little swagger goin' on, and we didn't even know what was goin' on, you know, the creativity that we really had. Because I was in the communications [department] at Yates. We were doin' music, we were doin' music videos in the studio and everything. I mean, we were doin' all kind of stuff at that school. We were emulating everything we were seeing on *A Different World, In Living Color* ... everything. We were acting all that stuff out.

All the dances and everything.

Yeah, and the music videos and everything. And so then it was sparking all of our creativity, and all of *our* culture—our Houston culture—started coming out. That's how it went down.

So that was an idea you had around that time, running a label. I mean, that was an aspiration that you had kind of early on.

Well, I saw the need. I just saw the need. I really didn't wanna be in the limelight. But I saw that there was a lot of confusion and chaos with the Screwed Up Click, and I saw that ... you know, because I would see the stress, I guess, and everything that my husband had to endure. And trying to ... well, *he* was cool with everybody. Everybody loved him and he was friends with them, and they always called him first for everything. And he was always there for them, and he was like a father figure to them. A lot of them would call him *Daddy.* 'Cause they know that he was gonna get on them if they were messin' up ... you know, he wasn't gonna sugarcoat anything. He was gonna tell them real, straight up, and be honest with them.

That's a big brother.

Right, and look out for them. At the same time, look out for 'em and have they back. And so they would always call him for everything.

It's coming out a lot more that there are ladies working behind the scenes, yeah?

It is, and I'm glad. Now it's coming out because a lot of the rappers are in monogamous relationships. They are, and it's really bein' publicized now, because they're really in wonderful, devoted relationships. And I was in one of 'em. Paul Wall and Crystal … they have a wonderful relationship. Bun and Queenie, and you know … there's some other rappers out here that really are devoted to they women and we've *been there with them*, all that they've endured, you know, we've supported them. And I did that every step of the way. I didn't wanna get too involved in his business and feel like I wasn't there for *him*. But I wanted to support him, so I went on and did *my* thing, did *my* career. I wanted to show him that, "Hey, I got my own career." You know, I graduated and started teachin' school. Graduated from college and started teaching school. And I was waiting, basically, for him to say, "Babe, you know, I think you could help me and be beneficial in this." And then he had did that right in '05. Finally he was like, "You know what? We need to turn this into more of a family operation." Because it comes to that point where you're young, you're with your guys, y'all hangin', you're doin' this, you're doin' that, and then when all that's gone, said and done, you go home to your family, and those are the people, the closest people with you, and you start havin' children. And everybody's life *did* start changin'. And so then it became more family-oriented. At the time, when we were … when I saw the need for somebody to step in and help them and this, this and that. I was in college, and they were all just young and hangin' and just … you know, they were just kids! They were just kids. And they had no sense of responsibility. They had no responsibility to step in, to be like, "Let me get something stable goin' on and get my family involved and really work this business." We're lookin' at that more so now. It's bein' publicized … as you look at the reality shows now with the celebrities, you see that all of the people in their family are basically around them doin' everything. So it's givin' you an example. It's giving you that example, whereas *that* wasn't even thought of or heard of what, 20 years ago, when these guys started out. They didn't know *what* to do. They really didn't know—they were clueless. They was just happy to have money in they pocket, ride around in a nice car … they were just clueless! They didn't know. They were kids.

Didn't know how long it would last or what made it work anyway.

No! And then the guys … the pressure came. It was all this peer pressure and egos start kickin' in … and whew, that can be ugly [*laughs*].

Well it's a really interesting point that you bring up about them being in longer, monogamous relationships, because people read the lyrics and they might not think that. But they are just lyrics …

Right, right! Music is an outlet of expression, so you're able to vent. So you get all that stuff out, and you're venting. Some of it is what you see … it's *therapy!* So you know, once you're gettin' it out, you're able to go on about your business, right? After you express yourself and get it off your chest, and then you recognize and you're aware, to talk about it … it makes you … you can't do the same thing that you're talkin' about. You gotta do something different. I hope. You're aware.

And just hope that people connect with it.

Right, right. But you know, the people—like Hawk and all of his stuff was changin'. You know, his life had changed. We had gotten married, we had kids, you know … the boys were the love of his life. All of his stuff, his whole mindset started changing. And his music—his lyrics—you know, he made some stuff real gutter, raunchy, and then he made some stuff where you could tell the maturity in him, and people really wanted him to be the same way that he was when he first started! And he struggled with that, because he was evolving and changing. And he wasn't on the corner sippin' syrup, you know, rollin' in the 'Burb, on the vogues and the elbows … I mean, he wasn't necessarily doin' that anymore because he was a grown man, gettin' married and all that. So, it was hard for him to kind of transition his music as you mature. You had that one audience, and then, you know, you have to start putting more substance into your music. And that's what he started doin'. He started putting more spiritual, more of a … you know, just really started tryin' to educate.

Striking a balance between who you're known as, as an artist, but who you're becoming as a person.

Right, right. That's true.

You can't fight off who you're becoming as a person. That's just where you're going.

That's right. That's right! You have to be real with it.

There was competition within the Screwed Up Click. Did you see that?

They were competin' on those Screw tapes. They were competin'. It was a big competition goin' on, too. On them Screw tapes. If Pokey was on there, E.S.G. was on there, whatever … they'd be kind of like battlin' on the cool.

Well, you hear stories about guys—one guy's in the corner writing his lyrics, another guy's in the corner writing his lyrics looking over his shoulder.

Yeah, yeah, yeah! Like I say, the egos took over. When they really saw that this was what it was doin', that they was gettin' the hood, the street popularity … what do they call it …

Street cred?

Hood celebrity? Neighborhood superstar? When they saw that they was becoming *that* from these tapes? Oh, baby—the testosterone kicked *out*. They started *battlin'*. I mean, it started becoming like … that's how the Click developed, because the weak didn't even step up, you know what I'm sayin'? It become a battle of the different hoods. The top dudes in each hood just started battlin', and whoever was on top, that was the *hood* that was kinda on top, too. And so the guys start—the traffic, people would gravitate toward the hood. To those hoods.

South Park was the place to go back then, huh?

It was popular! We used to just ride—I used to steal my mom's car just so I could ride either down Martin Luther King or Cullen. And we would just ride down those streets! And that was it. You would see somebody you know, you would see some car you recognize or somethin', you know. The car wash back then—all the car washes would be—have cars …

Be a line down the street.

Yep. It would be so fun.

How often do you drive back through South Park now?

It's rough. It's hard for me to go down Cullen. 'Cause, you know, his mom lived there. I lived there, too, at one point with them. Down there on Cullen. And you know, that's where he got killed, too, so that whole area just reminds me of him, so much. Every time I get on Cullen, it's just … South Park *period*—everything over there reminds me of him. Everything. So I don't really go to that area. And then, that area is … you know, it's janky. It's crime, it's raunchy over there. I don't fool around over there.

It's for real.

It's for real. It's raunchy over there. They'll get you in a minute. If you tryin' to get got. You gotta be careful over there. Even as a child, when I was hangin' out over there, or gettin' my mom's car, ridin' down there, I'd be scared to death. It was a thrill. It was a thrill just to ride down there and make it and ride back! [*laughs*] It was a thrill. And I'm from Third Ward. I grew up in Third Ward, but it's like in Third Ward, if you know everybody on your street, you feel comfortable. They don't really mess with you too much. But you still have your suspect people walkin' down the street. You gotta be careful. Well, not really I guess where I lived. You know, like I say, I grew up in this house. I really feel safe here. There's a lot of older people here on my street. I'm not down in the bottom. But, you know, they're cleaning that up, even!

They're gentrifying, yeah. Entire blocks that are just townhomes there.

Yeah! You see all those lofts and townhomes and stuff now? Yes!

You don't recognize it.

I know! And they're sellin' them for like $300,000 ...

You look at neighborhoods like that and South Park and Fifth Ward that have for so many years have had poor civic services, bad streets, bad water, all this kind of stuff, and then all of the sudden the city goes in and starts fixing those things up and what do you know—you have developers putting up townhomes. It's happening to Fifth Ward, too. Fourth Ward's gone.

Yep. It's gone. It sure is. It's gonna change. And you know what? It's due for a change.

I guess so, some parts of it for sure.

But it's up to the people to keep the culture going. And that's what is hard with Screw because, to be very honest, with me and Papa Screw, we're really fightin' trying to keep our family's legacy, and uphold their legacy. Because it's no road but this. And that's why I was so excited about the collection at U of H, because this is going to solidify their name in the history of the hip-hop, the creation of hip-hop culture here in Houston. It's going to solidify their names, and the legends that they were, and instrumental pieces that they were in the hip-hop history here in Houston, Texas. So it's gonna do that! And give 'em that credit, that recognition. And it's just not that type of respect here in Houston for their names. Because of their deaths, the way ... whatever type of hidden agenda or conspiracy that it looks like, you know what I'm sayin'?

Yeah.

The way that all of the guys died, everything was just really crazy to me. It's really like surreal. It's like some type of crazy conspiracy story. You know, novel or something.

Their deaths really are all very bizarre.

The way everything plotted out, you know what I mean? And then it's like ... so it's just really something. So, they don't get the recognition.

When would you pinpoint when you felt that Screw culture had really come to life?

You know, every region, I guess had their birth of their own culture. Of course the birth of hip-hop was from New York, but then there was other births in different regions, and so our birth ... we developed a whole sound. It's like the sound from Texas. It's like our soundtrack for Texas, like the West Coast developed their sound with Dr. Dre, and the East Coast developed their sound, you know, with Russell and Rick Rubin, and so then we developed *our* own sound. And in that culture, with the birth of [Screw] culture came a slang, a whole new glossary of Ebonics. A whole new glossary of Ebonics came out of our culture. That, the cars, the slang, and the influence is *so great* that *every* record that damn near comes out of Houston or Texas has some type of influence, some little bit and piece in there. It's something that they have taken from the Screw tapes. The influence is just that great. That's how you know it's a record almost—you can almost spot a Texas artist anywhere, because of maybe a word they say or something they say that's associated with Screw, that's associated with the Screw movement. And like I say, Fat Pat—Pat was ... he really created a lot of those slang words. You know, his creativity was unreal. His swag was just unreal. Him and Keke and Hawk, they would joke and rank on each other and just say things, and then just turn it into the whole culture. And then the clubs, it was the clubs, the events, the slang ... because they would make Screw tapes for the events. They would make the Bayou Classic Screw tapes. So, you know, you had to go to the Bayou [Bucket] Classic to hear the new one. You know, everybody who was there would be jammin' that tape. After the Kappa, or before the Kappa. So it was the events, the slang ... I just wanna make sure the culture is really represented. From the guys' perspective, they gonna tell you about everything else, but from the *woman's* perspective, I wanna make sure that the culture is represented in its entirety, so that no element of the culture is left out.

Part of it with Pat, with that slang and that creativity—part of that was that he was just really funny, wasn't he?

He was *funny*. All of 'em! Keke is a comedian! Keke is a ... Pat—they would have you in *tears*, laughing. Hawk, all of—when they got together, they would play "the Dozens" 'til six in the morning. All day. They would rank on each other, and it was *hilarious*. You would be in stitches. And they'd have some skits, too. On some of these Screw tapes, where they laughing, you hear Hawk in the background just crackin' up. You know, laughin' and this and that. Pat was just ridiculous. He would dance and stuff, all of that. He made up the Southside dance! He made the dance up!

I didn't realize that.

Yeah, and then Keke did the song for it, and then Pat was like, "I gotta make *me* a dance song!" So then he did "Body Rock." They were just entertainers. They were funny. It was just the gift of gab.

That's what I've always heard, that Pat could have just got up on stage and talked and made everybody laugh.

Yep. He was. He was hilarious. A personality. They're raising the roof, you know how they hit the roof? That was him.

Where did that come from?

It came from ... I think it came from ... at first, I think the guys would just speak in the slabs, right? But a lot of the slabs would just be stickin' to each other, but some of the slabs I think you couldn't roll down the windows, so they would just put they hand up in the air. And then, it started ... they would hit the roof when they'd be rockin' from side to side. Like Pat would do that, roll his arms from side to side, when he was bangin', when he was jammin', in the groove ... just jammin' some music. And he would just be groovin' and dancin', and he would start hittin' the roof. When he saw somebody in another slab—he'd be ridin' in his slab, he'd see another slab or somethin', and he'd be jammin', and he would start hittin' the roof.

(2011)

Wood

RAPPER · THIRD WARD

Already an established artist by the time he met up with DJ Screw in the late 1990s, Wood saw a rebirth in his career virtually overnight when he became part of the second wave of rappers on Screw's legendary mixtapes—joining the tide of original Screwed Up Click rappers Fat Pat, Lil' Keke, Big Pokey, E.S.G., Hawk and Big Moe.

Where did you come up in Houston?

In the bottom part of Third Ward, close to 45 and Scott.

How old are you?

Man I'm 34-years-old.

What year would you say that crack came into that neighborhood?

Actually [at] about 10 I had my first look at it. I actually touched it and sold it at that age. Man, it got real hectic between '84 and '86. It was a real fast transformation from an all right neighborhood to a war zone.

And crack was the main proponent of that.

Correct. Of course you had your marijuana and the same amount … you know, the pills and all that stuff. But what really took a toll on the neighborhood and the lifestyles of people was the crack.

Why do you think the crack trade was so different than say, somebody who sold weed or even cocaine?

Actually, because of the … being able to, you know, get intoxicated anywhere and the amount of time that it hits your bloodstream, the amount of time that you begin the peaking at the high. I think that made a difference 'cause, you know, with cocaine you had to go indoors somewhere and do it, you know, get out of peoples' sight and do it. But with the crack I mean … they do it on the street corner, you know, they do it in abandoned houses. The cocaine was more of a party drug and you had to live the lifestyle, you had to have the wine or the expensive liquor and you had to be at an inside party somewhere. You know, with the upper echelon of people, and crack was more of the lower echelon. And you had them anywhere. I mean you could sell it anywhere. In the alleyways …

Some will say that the reason you had such a problem with crack in neighborhoods like that is because it just kind of went uncontested. That it wasn't really policed.

Of course a lot of people didn't know what it was or know what was going on. It was kind of like a secret society thing. That's how it became … it spread around like wildfire because of that. I mean, everybody knew of the cocaine, everybody knew of … I guess you would call it freebase at that point in time, but once it got around for a normal person to create it, man it was ridiculous.

So what was the economy like in the neighborhood at that time?

Actually if it wasn't for the crack, I probably never would have seen the downside of the neighborhood. I never woulda lived in the bad part of that neighborhood. We went from maybe a $265,000 home off of North MacGregor, minutes … maybe 45 seconds away from Carl Lewis's mansion. And a couple of more … you look at people like Debbie Allen and Phylicia Allen—or Phylicia Rashad—they grew up in Third Ward, they grew up in my neighborhood and they ended up buying mansions off of North MacGregor. So, coming from *that* side of the neighborhood to our house burning down and having to move to the ghetto side of the neighborhood, it was *real.* You know, for a kid I didn't really understand what was going on. It was a real stunning event, and as I grew older I was able to see what it was. I actually thought we just foreclosed on our house—our home got burnt up and we had to foreclose on it—but it was actually due to my mother starting a hectic drug habit. A $300 to $400-a-day habit, and me being a 10-year-old kid … I went from the kid that everybody wanted to play with my toys and visit my house to being the kid who doesn't have any toys, who don't have any food. It was widespread. Nobody cared. I mean it was actually like the police policed for neighborhood crime such as burglary, rape, car theft, stuff of that sort, because the drug peddlin' was always … it was like they policed it, but they watched … they just kept on goin'. They kept their nose out of everybody's business.

But it wasn't just something that was on the streets. By your own contention with the story about your mother … it was trickling into the households.

Oh it was into the households! Now, don't get me wrong—we went from a $265,000 house and my mom was running my grandmother … my grandmother had a funeral home that was in Third Ward called Jackson Funeral Home that was in the Third Ward area since 1911. So it's been passed down from generation to generation and my mom was actually the owner and she did the embalming and the directing. You know, you had the funeral director, she did the directing and no one in their right mind believed that … "Oh, she own her own business." She has this predominantly black-owned business that's been here for almost 100 years at this point. For *her* to be on drugs, it was like, "Nah, she not on drugs—she has this business, they have limousines, they have a nice car, nice house." But some way, somehow, some fashion—I don't know if it was one of my mom's new boyfriends or what … a party, I don't know what happened, but it changed drastically. And of course—it was ridiculous, because as I went from 10 to 15, me and my friends were actually … I would sell one of my friend's mom drugs and he would sell my mom drugs so we wouldn't do it to our own parents. It was ridiculous. And … you know, after … that was 10 to 15, you know we're kinda young, we're gettin' used to what's really … we're catchin' up with reality and after 15, 16, 17, 18 I was like, "Okay, I have this guy in my mom's house because my mom owes him money—he's runnin' my house." And at that point in time I took a drastic step. I actually said, "Okay, well, this guy's not runnin' my mom's house—this is not a crack house, but my mom does have friends that come to smoke, so I'm gonna get me enough crack and this guy has to leave and I'm gonna run this crack house." And it was ridiculous, and it made me who I am, but it also hindered me, you know? Because I took a step, and I read the Bible, I read the Qur'an and stuff like that, and I was actually dealin' death in my own house, you know? But it was just so I could have a little control in my household. And me and my friends, man, I mean, we crack jokes about it now today, but we were so young, and we *did* have feelings. We tried to act hard because of the streets, but we were so sentimental—I would sell his mom dope and he would sell my mom dope but at that time we did not step across that line and do it to ourselves. After a while, you know, after we grown up and we got hardened by … the crack hardened us because we got to see good households broke down and after a while everybody's like, "Fuck it, I don't give a fuck. Fuck this shit. My life's fucked up, fuck it." Once we got to that point it was like, "Shit, I'm gonna sell my momma crack—fuck it." I don't want nobody else in my house, I don't want my mom suckin' somebody else's dick for no rock, you know what I'm sayin'? That's the low that it got to.

And it makes you realize how powerful that drug is. It can get my mama. It can get anybody.

Man … and of course, I have her in a nice … she lives in a mansion in Kingwood now, but I mean it took 20 years to break that fuckin' habit, man—20 years. Now, of course, I didn't … I actually took her—they had a SHIC program in Galveston—I actually drove her to Galveston, got her to sign up. Now, during the crack age, my father moved me. When I was 12 or 13, he seen what was goin' on, and I moved to the Almeda Mall area. I ended up goin' to Beverly Hills and Dobie High School instead of goin' in Third Ward. He pulled me out that circle, was tryin' to get me out of that circle 'cause he seen what was goin' on, but at that point in time, man, we went from a $265,000 house to my mom movin' into a shotgun house. To the funeral home closing down.

So how did the habit eventually break? For her.

I didn't have anything to do with it. I actually drove her to the SHIC and before I got to Almeda Mall … I drove her to Galveston, I stopped, I got to Almeda Mall, I grabbed me some clothes outta Almeda Mall and before I made it back to Third Ward, you would not believe it but my mom was already back home. I had just dropped her off in Galveston.

Jesus.

So, you know, me, bein' from Third Ward, I'm like, "I'ma stop off at Almeda Mall. I used to live out here, lemme go shopping. I wanna feel good about myself. I just dropped my mom off." And I go into the mall and grab me a lil' something, come back and drive back to my neighborhood and there she is—she's sittin' on the front porch. I took her keys, I took everything from her to try and make her not get home, and she just hitched a ride. At the SHIC, she signed herself in and she signed herself out. And she end up gettin' home … beatin' *me* home. And I was like, *"Whoa."* But what made her change was actually—I didn't have anything to do with it, man. It was her pastor of her church. He actually came to my weddin', and he was a good man, man. It was all the church. It was all him. He got her straight. He put her in a hotel for about two months. And then found her a home and I helped put up money for a home and now we got her a nice mansion in Kingwood. I mean, she's not my same mom because you cannot wash away what drugs do to people. I don't care if it's marijuana—I don't care what it is—alcohol. You cannot wash away what it does to people. She's not the mom that I used to have, but she's a better person. She maybe smokes cigarettes now, maybe drink a beer here and there, but no drugs. It wasn't my power. It was the power of the Lord, man, and her pastor. She's been to SHIC three or four times, she's been to the penitentiary before … all behind crack. And it's changed now because, you know, I don't know too many 60-year-olds doin' drugs, but you know … I don't know if it's her getting old or the pastor or a combination of things, but I got her in a mansion and I'm proud of her now. We grew up. And I'm good with that.

What perspective did that give you, seeing that from such a young age? Did you ever get hooked yourself?

No. No, never.

Why do you think you didn't? I mean did you try it?

Nope, nope. Never. I actually … now, during my heyday … she taught me how to cook it myself. Of course she taught me the right way, to cook the best—so she taught me how to cook it and cook it and cook it, and during all the chaos, maybe there's a time or another I'd do the Tony Montana—I'd try to inhale me some. And I didn't get hooked. Man, it was just something I was doin' because I was buyin' a lot of powder and I had to cook it up and I'd just … I'd sniff me some and then go ahead and cook it, but it never became a habit. I never did it more than three or four times. Of course I smoke weed, sip syrup, but other than that … cocaine—I seen what it done to my family so I couldn't do it.

So in Third Ward at that time, when you were coming up in '84, '85, '86 as a young teenager—were there options for jobs at that point or was it kind of understood that selling was a way out? Or a way in?

It was the thing to do, man. If you was a young teen and your household didn't have income, you had no choice.

No other options.

No other options. I had no other options. I mean I tried sackin' groceries early. They let me sack groceries early. You know, I got a job at Kroger when I was like 14, sackin' groceries. But that was only just to get me started in the dope game. So I worked there two or three weeks, get my check, take that check, go buy me some drugs. Now of course, mind you—I *could* have actually tried another route, but me bein' an average inner city kid, I said, "Okay, this is the route I'm gonna take because it's the easiest route right now, and *nobody's* makin' $1,200 a day."

Is that how much you made selling?

Yeah when I was a kid I was makin' like $1,200 a day. Of course, I wasn't doin' anything with it. I would end up having to right the shit with my mama's rent man. Other than payin' bills and keeping the lights and stuff on … I mean, it taught me a lot of responsibility. I'm 34-years-old now, but I been livin' at home since I was like 19, I had an apartment at 17. It taught me payin' bills. It taught me responsibility. As well as a whole lot of negative shit.

So when did rap come into it for you?

Now, of course, me bein' the kid that I was, I went from havin' a mother and father in the household—my father was probably makin' $100,000 or better, my mother was probably makin' $100,000 or better—I was spoiled. So before my teens, I really had nothing to trigger me to write poetry or to write my feelings on paper. Now, when all of this came in, that was when I was like, "I need to write some of this shit down because I've seen … *enough,*" you know? I watched my mom and my dad get divorced. I watched the home that I grew up in—I'm supposed to be comin' home from college to visit—I watched that get washed away. I watched my brothers who played sports lose chances of havin' scholarships and that type of thing because of my mama's not bein' able to be a parent, you know? My father had to come kidnap me and my brothers from my mother to come and raise us in the Pasadena School District area. That actually helped, but it always made me run back to Third Ward, run back to Third Ward. And it just got ridiculous. At 13, I got introduced to poetry through school, right? So I broke the stanzas down to bars, I broke the bridges down to the hooks, you know, I used the whole of poetry to learn how to do my rap. I actually … in sixth grade or seventh grade we had a talent show and I actually used something that I got … a poem out of a book, I actually revised it, or what we call a remix, and actually made it into a rap and performed it at a talent show and everybody went crazy and I was like … "Either I have a gift or I'm pretty good at this thing or … everybody just wants somebody to entertain them." So at 10-years-old I had on my Run–D.M.C. Adidas sweatsuit, my Adidas shoes, and I did a talent show at school. And then following school, the school talent show, I did a talent show at a summer camp at the YMCA on Wheeler next to TSU. And after those two talent shows—I actually won—I said, "Okay, well maybe I caught something. I learned how to write raps through poetry here, and now I'm in seventh and eighth grade in English class and I'm not doin' English. I'm writin' raps." It became habit. From like seventh to ninth grade I was just writin' raps. Just writin' raps, writin' raps, now in the ninth grade. Because I was still in a nice area. Now if I was still in Third Ward, I maybe never woulda seen a studio, you know?

What area were you in at this point? You're talking about down by Almeda?

Yeah, I lived Sagemont in the Kirkwood area. I lived like off of Beamer and Blackhawk. Now, bein' in that area, in that neck of the woods, I happened to run across the wife of a Hispanic friend named Noah and he has a whole fuckin' studio in his house. He's in high school, he's the drum major of Dobie High School and of course he knows music—he's the drum major—he actually plays some instruments but he was so talented that he didn't need an instrument. He was the drum major. He had a studio in his house. And then I met this other kid who lived in Deer Park and he was like maybe … I was in ninth grade, he was maybe in seventh grade. And this guy was a fuckin' … he was a musical wiz, but he kinda screwed up his life. He went to jail and stuff like that. But I had the chance to actually work in studios as a kid and to start payin' for studio time with the money I was makin' at my mom's house. I was makin' … I was spending $20 here, studio time, $15 here, studio time. And it helped me become who I am now. I learned a lot about the music business as a kid. I managed my own group at 15-years-old. We had the club called Metronome that was behind Almeda Mall. They had one behind Almeda Mall and one on Gessner. They was teen clubs then. I would walk in a teen club, find the owner/manager, tell 'em I had a group, tell 'em I wanted to perform. And it was … it was crazy 'cause I was a kid, and I used my grandmother's funeral home limousine [*laughs*]. I used the limousine from the funeral home, I used the music we got from the studio and then we'd go to the lil' small teen clubs, perform, we'd have a limo outside waitin', I'd get 33 percent of the door. And as a fuckin' kid I'm negotiatin' with the manager of a club and I'm getting 33 percent of the door. It created somethin'. My little brother, a lot of our friends came to our first concert and they were like, "Man, it almost looked like you guys were performin' for real!" I'm like, "We *were* performin' for real." But because they know me and we're young, you know, they actually were like, "Okay, you guys look like somebody other than yourself." And that was like the start, man. Ninth grade triggered it, tenth grade it was over. I was spending all my money on studio time. People lookin' at me like, "You're a fuckin' kid—where you gettin' all this money from, and why are you spendin' it on music? Shouldn't you be buyin' a bike? Or somethin' of that sort? A remote control car?" But I seen so much as a kid and I lost what I had, that I felt like I had to give my story and tell a story about how your life can change or how you should keep your head up or, you know, this is how it is as a kid comin' up without a parent. And my father actually passed away at that time.

Wow. Right at that same time, huh?

At that same time, so my mom was on drugs, my father passed away and I was like … I already started my little music venture, but it was like … there was no light at the end of the tunnel at that point.

You take a deep breath and say, "I gotta do this."

What do I gotta do, you know? My father passed away two weeks before Christmas. And there it was. I had—like some pastors and some reverends—now I have testimony. I've lost *everything*. I was the spoiledest kid I've ever known. I've lost everything that had me in that position. My father's gone, my mother's smokin' crack. I will never be that spoiled kid again. I feel like I had a story. I talked about my dad passin' away. I talked about my mom bein' on drugs. I talked about me livin' in the street, sleepin' at bus stops, sleepin' in my potnah Grace's dad's car. And then I actually … this is when the trouble starts, because when I lost my father, I was angry at the world. Because he was a genuine man. He had a lot of money, he had a good heart and he would take me to the mall and buy my friends tennis shoes. That's the type of money he had. If you accidentally got in the car with us and we were goin' to Toys "R" Us or somethin', you would get somethin'. That's the type of person he was, and I lost that. I lost him and I was mad at the world and I was a dumbass lil' kid. I was mad at the world. So 15, 16, 17 … here comes … now I'm grabbin' the pistols, now I'm takin' the knives, now I'm at the mall stealin' cars, now I'm shootin' up parks. The clubs that I was performin' in, I'm just goin' to the club now to start fights and shootin' up, havin' fights outside of the club. Man, it got ridiculous at that point. I felt like I didn't have anything to live for because my dad was like my best friend, you know? Mom's smokin', dad gone, my little brother passed away—within two months I had a drastic change. My father passed away December 15, my grandmother passed away January 20, my youngest brother passed away January 19. All this is 1989 … well, this is December '89 and January of '90. And at that point I went ridiculously crazy. I ended up bein' on probation. I ended up goin' to jail. I mean, a lot of crimes I was doin', I actually got away with, but when my father passed away that's when the erratic side came out of me and I didn't give a … it was like I wanted to get caught, you know? I actually had $900 in my pocket and I'm at Baybrook Mall and these kids come out and they're happy, and I'm tryin' to rob them of their happiness. I actually wasn't tryin' to take their … whatever they bought out of the mall out of their hands. I was tryin' to rob them of their happiness 'cause I felt so unhappy because I was livin' with my stepmom. My mom was on crack. My dad was dead. I felt like nobody understood me. I stole some bags from somebody at the mall. They came to my school, took me to jail, yadda yadda yadda and that beginned my criminal career because without that small lil'—me catchin' the theft case and bein' put on probation—I probably woulda never went to jail. But at that age, I was 17, and, "Okay, now I'm goin' to jail, I'm writin' raps in jail." They sent me to boot camp. I'm on probation and now I'm the crack man, the weed man and it just got ridiculous.

How long were you on lock?

The first time I went to jail I was 17. I ended up doin' 90 days in boot camp and getting out on probation.

That's not too bad.

After that, of course, bein' on probation, I still didn't learn my lesson. I still was runnin' the streets. My head was hard. I moved to the Southwest side. I'm a teenager now. I was 17. Nobody wants to take care of me. I was livin' with my aunt. She was like, "Your parents are dead and you've moved in with me, you're goin' to jail. I caught you with this pound of weed." My aunt actually thought a pound of weed was like a kilo of cocaine [*laughs*], and she said everybody was gonna break into her house and come kill everybody for a pound of weed. I said, "Aunt, this is a pound of weed. I paid for this. It's paid for. Nobody fronted it to me and nobody's comin' to kill me." But in her mind she'd never seen that amount of weed in her life. Of course, my dad and his brothers—they went to Vietnam, so they mingled with weed. They probably mingled with heroin and none of us ever knew about it. But they mingled with weed and my grandparents and all their brothers and sisters knew about it. But she seen me with a pound of weed and she's like, "Oh, you gotta get out." So I got out and got me an apartment at 17. I supposed to've played on the state team for Willowridge. I'm playin' basketball. I go to jail two weeks before the state basketball game. And shit, there it was. They sent me to the pen that time.

That's a volatile time, too, because a lot of people will recognize that 15, 16, 17, 18—that's a young man's criminal prime.

Exactly.

Regardless of color, regardless of class or anything like that.

Anything like that. It was my prime and it was my *decline* because we killed maybe a good 10 years of my life. It took me from 17 when I first got in trouble … it took me to 27 to get out of trouble. They gave me 10 years' probation, and in that 10 years' probation, I end up going back to jail three or four times just because they had me on probation.

Age 27 … that sounds like about the time Screw came into your life.

Right, right, right. Exactly. Now, of course, a lot of people don't know that me and Screw actually met at that point when I'm about 15. Now, Screw being from Smithville, Texas, he actually moved to Houston and he actually lived on the same side of town as me once I moved by Almeda Mall.

Yeah one of the houses that he and Papa Screw had together was down there, wasn't it?

Yeah, and when I was goin' to Beverly Hills, he was going to South Houston, and once I started goin' to Dobie, he started goin' to South Houston High School, and he end up transferring to Sterling, but while he was at South Houston High School he was doin' parties and stuff like that and he actually DJed a couple of my friend's parties and we met. I tried to freestyle while he was DJin' and all that. But I never knew that this was gonna be *DJ Screw.* That was his name and he was a DJ, but he wasn't doin' the tapes at that point in time. Now, I lived in Kirkwood and he lived in Quail Meadows off of Telephone. I actually would ride my bike all the way down Fuqua, all the way down the freeway, to Telephone Road where his neighborhood was at, because I had a few friends down there, and that's where I met him. My friend had a birthday party and he was the DJ and then another person had a birthday and, "Hey, that's the same fuckin' DJ—he's a pretty good DJ!" And it took maybe 10 years after that for us to, you know, get reintroduced. They was, "This DJ Screw," and I'm like, "Ah, I know that dude! He used to DJ parties when I was in high school!" And of course he was makin' tapes by then. I didn't actually become a member of the Screwed Up Click until like '95, '96. I actually been knowin' him as a DJ. I didn't know him as, "Oh, he makes mixtapes. He's a mixtape DJ." He was just a party DJ when I met him.

Was there a certain sort of process in becoming a member of the Screwed Up Click? Like would he just say, "Okay, you're SUC?"

Man, that shit is like an unwritten ... it's like an unwritten game code almost! Now, he actually recruited ... kind of like, you know how they have these high anarchy groups where you can't invite yourself or you can't try to go try out. They just gotta come find you. Kind of like I guess you'd say something like Illuminati or Masons or somethin' like that where you can't just go volunteer and say, "Hey, I wanna be down with you guys." It was kind of the exact *opposite* of that, you know? And you would actually feel the music and you'd be like, "Man, that sounds like ... that sounds like a revolution. I wanna be a part of that." Everybody wants to be a part of somethin'. And you'd get you a ride and you'd go over there, however you'd get over there—you had to know somebody to get over there. And once you got to him, you had to say, "Okay, I make beats," or "I'm a rapper," or "I promote ..." "I don't do nothin', I just love what you guys are doin'." And he would make a decision and he would say from that point ... actually, what he done for me, I can speak for my personal lil' venture with him. I actually came to his house. Grace was already goin'—I went back to jail, of course. I went back to jail during the '90s—and I actually taught Grace how to write raps. And while I'm in jail he goes to Screw's house and he's makin' tapes, he's learnin' how to write raps and I come home and they're like, "Grace on Screw tapes." And I'm like, "Grace on Screw tapes? I taught that nigga how to rap! When I left he was writin' two lines—every rap was two lines and he would ball the paper up—*he's* on Screw tapes?" And they were like, "Yeah, you did good, man, Grace *hot*, man! Grace got like four or five Screw tapes out!" So I was like, "Okay, cool." Grace had just came home, I had just came home, and Al-D had just came home. We all came home like February or January. We all came home in like two months. And this is when Keke had his foot out of the door, he's like, "Man, Screw can't do nothin' for me, I'm the hottest nigga in the Click, I gotta go make some money. Screw ain't helpin' me." He's on the way out of the door. Now, Fat Pat on the other hand ... Screw actually knew, "Fat Pat had to go somewhere else to be *him,* because I can't do enough for him. He's big enough to need a major record label behind him to push him."

If Pat would have lived he'd be the biggest ... easily.

Right, right. And Keke always wanted to be that, but it was like everybody knew it was Pat, you know? So Screw wasn't mad at Pat for Pat goin' to Wreckshop. Screw was mad at Keke for goin' to Jam Down because Screw and Al-D were signed to Jam Down for five years, they know how Pat, the guy that own Jam Down, Pat, they know how he play with the money. And Screw told all of them, he said, "Man, I don't care what y'all do, who y'all mess around with in the rap game, but whatever you do, don't go deal with him because he's my arch rival. I worked with him, he screwed me out my money, he slowed my career down. Don't go there." And Keke actually took that, what Screw said, and was like, "Damn, man, I'm goin' over there. If he got money, I'm goin' to get it." So Screw was lookin' for some new guys to, you know, rebuild the name because Keke was the hottest member. Pat was goin' to sign with somebody and he's like, "Fuck it, I need some new hot guys." So me, Grace and Al-D was like the new young regime. And they brought me to Screw house and Screw looked at me like, "Nigga, I know a million niggas that rap. Don't come in here with that rap shit. We're just kickin' it. We're just doin' music." I'm like, "All right! I feel you." And then I look up and Grace is playin' a tape and Screw got my music on and I'm like, "Damn, you screw my music already?" And he's like, "Nah, that's Grace tape. Grace put that song on there. I like this song, but Grace put that song on there." So I said, "Okay, you got my song—you already screwed one of my songs—when I'm gonna get to rap?" Screw looked at me like, "Nigga … wait. Nigga calm down. Not right now." And you know, I'm lookin' at everything 'cause I was 15-years-old but I done read management, marketing books and all that crap. I'm just like, "Man, you actually screwin' me!" And he's like, "Nahhh … not *really*." He looked me in my eye and said, "Now, here's the thing: We are gonna do music." And I'm lookin' at him like, "How you know we're gonna do music? I'm mad right now—how do you know we're gonna do music?" And he's like, "We might not do it today, we might not do it two weeks from today, we might not do it two months from today, we might not do it two years from today, but we're gonna do somethin'." And when he said that I was like, "Man, that's the most … bunch of bullshit I ever heard in my life.'

He had that interesting sort of power, an effect on people, though. Didn't he?

Yeah, he had a lot of power. A lot of people didn't actually or didn't even recognize what he did for the city or what he did for like Austin and San Antonio. Those were gangbanger cities, and with the Screw music, Screw was sayin' "player, player." He wasn't sayin' "banger this, banger that," or "this gang and that gang." Everything he meant was bein' player, and a player would be someone who was playin' the game, who's not gonna be mad at the players in the game or the game. They're just gonna play, you know, whatever cards are taken, you're gonna play 'em. And that attitude did slow Austin and San Antonio down because they were actually gangbangin' at that point in time, and Screw came up with this player music where everybody was smokin' weed and sippin' syrup and *relaxing* … and bein' laid back and cool. It kind of stopped everybody from wearin' their bandanas and tearin' each other up at parties and shit. A lot of people don't understand that. They don't even see that. All they know is, "That's bad man, that's promotin' drugs and yadda yadda yadda yadda," but the guy was … he was an icon in his own right.

That had something to do with the music, but didn't that also have something to do with the way he carried himself, the sort of vibe that he put out?

Yes sir. He was laid back, man. He would never get mad. He'd be mad at somebody … like he was mad Keke, man, I acted like, "You want me to do somethin' to him?!" And he's like, "Nah, man … that's not what Screwed Up Click *is!*" And I'm like, "Nah, I got to bust somebody head, Screw, 'cause if I bust one nigga head, everybody gonna act right." Screw was like, "*That's not what the Screwed Up movement is about.*" And I had to learn, you know? When me and Z-Ro came to the cap all we was thinkin' about was acin' out everybody who wasn't … there was a lot of people who was generally into the music just by bein' in the in crowd or what they could get from hangin' around Screw or hangin' around the guys Screw knew. Like, "Oh this guy has money, so I'ma hang around the Click 'cause them niggas got that rap money. They sell dope and they make rap money," you know what I mean? And me and Z-Ro, bein' hardheads and thinkin', "Oh, I'm bad. I'm tough." We thinkin' we got to prove a point, but all he actually wanted us to do was to be artists.

(2008)

K-Otix

Formed in 1992, Damien Randle and Micah Nickerson (together now known as The Legendary KO), along with their producer and DJ Russel Gonzalez (a.k.a. The ARE), comprised one of Houston's best known hip-hop artists on the underground side, an entirely different genre than the more popularized Southern gangsta rap style for which Houston is so well known.

Houston has always been sort of split between the gangsta rap side and the sort of underground, hip-hop side. Why do you think there's never really been any crossover?

DAMIEN: Well that's a good question. You know, I grew up right in the middle of the whole SUC movement, so a lot of the folks that I grew up with were involved with or really gravitated towards that. I don't think there's really a conscious effort to *not* work together. I think, from what I've seen, it's really based on what your influences are. I tend to say that the people who have what people consider the "underground" sound have been kind of influenced you know, not only regionally but from the East Coast and the West Coast and from different parts they kind of put it all together. Whereas I think a lot of folks in the South Park Coalition and I'd say the SUC really drew their influences from people who were more homegrown. You're gettin' to the same place but you're just taking a different road to get there. I think there just hasn't been a lot of crossover for the same reason why different sub-genres in rock haven't crossed over. I think there's a mutual *respect* for it, but I just think it just hasn't happened to a large degree because it hasn't happened. I don't think there's been any conscious separation between the two.

MICAH: I think that it depends on what you want as the outcome. As far as a underground artist, they may see gathering together with a more Southern artist ... see it as more like a sellout move or more of a *get money* type of maneuver, whereas a more Southern artist might get with a underground artist to try to manipulate the artist to get more of a ... of a hip-hop type of crowd for their audience. So I think it depends on the motive as well, and just to kind of bounce off what D said, I think the respect is definitely there because most of these artists know of each other and pretty much ... we know of Devin and Scarface and, you know, Slim Thug and whatnot but the difference is as far as mixin' the style together ... is there an audience for that? Will a syrup sippin', Screwtape listener listen to a more hip-hop audience and vice-versa?

It's funny that you mention Devin because he's one artist you could really say is nestled between the two genres.

DAMIEN: Devin's a good example of that because he's one of those people that draws influences from a lot of places and, you know, he's fortunate in that he has a very large international following too. And just to kind of piggyback off of what Mic said, the audience that you develop really plays a strong hand in the type of music that you make, and Devin's a good example of that I think because he makes music with more universal themes than a lot of other Southern rappers because his audience is a bit more diverse than what you might see from other regional acts.

Being that there is a sort of division there, did the H-town explosion of 2005 affect you guys at all?

DAMIEN: It affected us, but not in the way that a lot of people feel. The thing is, we've been doing this since 1992, so we've had a pretty... you know, most of our audience is not in the Houston area. Most of our audience is in other parts of the country or international. We have a lot of European fans over there. So for us, we already had an audience in place that was checking us out. Then when 2005 came around, a lot of them were more or less like, "Oh, y'all been doing this already... what's goin' on over here?" A lot of them—Paul Wall, Slim Thug, Mike Jones—came to the forefront at that time, but at the same time a lot of our fan base around the world was like, "We already knew about you guys—how come they aren't including y'all in the same kind of talk?" I know a lot of people asked us if we felt sort of left out and we didn't feel left out. We were still doing shows overseas at the time.

You guys really escaped the stigma of being the "Group That Did The 'George Bush Doesn't Like Black People' Song." Was there a conscious effort to not allow it to become a novelty?

MIC: You know, when we first made the song, we just wanted to capture the moment. I think a lot of people from other parts of the country didn't really understand how it felt to be in that type of situation. So me and D were like, "Let's capture the moment, take a snapshot of this moment, to let other people, when they hear it, they can actually feel it." And I think when we made the song, we didn't really expect it to blow up like it did, and it kind of lit its own fire and kind of went a whole other direction, and the whole point of the topic was really to keep it serious, to kind of, you know, not overshadow the fact that it was a tragedy that happened. And that's why we didn't try to capitalize off of it.

DAMIEN: And the trap that a lot of artists fall into when they come across something like that... you gotta understand that for us, this was something that was written while Mic was at home and I was on my way home from work. Then we recorded it and put it out. So it's like he said—we wanted to capture the moment. This sounds like a cliché, but we honestly never knew it would spread like that. You know, we did it on Tuesday. By Thursday it was already all over the place and we started getting calls from people. It took us by surprise... and we didn't even have to say this—we're two grown intelligent dudes and we know this: You can't turn yourself into a novelty. Truth be told, that's not really *our* song. We just kind of put down, in verse, what other people were going through, what other people were feelin', but we can't lay claim to the whole thing. So, we don't want to make too much out of it because we don't want to be known as, like you said, the "Guys That Did The George Bush Song." We didn't want people to expect us to do more George Bush songs and all of the sudden we become pigeonholed and this and that. We were two dudes that live next door to you or across the state from you that happened to be right in the middle of everything that was going on.

(2008)

G-Dash

PRESIDENT OF SWISHAHOUSE RECORDS

This interview was conducted for a magazine article on the business side of Swishahouse back in 2005. The piece never did run, but this is that conversation in its entirety. Interview conducted at the home of longtime Swishahouse Art Director Mike Frost.

You know, everybody knows about the artists at Swishahouse, but very few of us know anything about the label itself, the story behind it.

On the business end?

Well, on the business end and just the story. What did you do before you were with Swishahouse?

I was working for the penitentiary. For like eight years.

In Houston, Huntsville?

Nah, I worked at Rosharon, a unit in Dayton and a unit in Atascocita. That was like a state jail but you know I was always doin' this music on the side.

You worked in the industry or were you producing, rapping, what?

At one point I was rappin', like early in the game. When Watts had regular speed mixtapes I was rappin'.

Under the name G-Dash?

Yeah. I wasn't one of these dudes—you see dudes now like 35, 36-years-old been rappin' since they was 18 and had a deal since they was 18. I started sayin', "Damn, I'ma jump on this business side." 'Cause I'm just not connected to the streets like I used to be 'cause I'm not a youngster no more. I got priorities and family to take care of, so I needed to start gettin' on the business end.

You already felt like you had a good business sense.

Yeah, yeah, most definitely. So I started kinda readin' up on it, and I really got my experience with dealin' with this label shit dealin' with Southwest Wholesale. 'Cause you know we was an indie label at the time, distributed through Southwest, 'cause you know Southwest was the biggest thing goin' as far as distributorships back then. So that's how I got my game, and you know I did a lot of stuff that other guys wasn't doin'. You had other labels in Houston that might've been lettin' Southwest press up they product? I wasn't lettin' 'em do it. I was pressing up my own product and I was givin' it to 'em.

You wanted to keep everything in-house.

Yeah 'cause I heard so many rumors about the bootleggin' and them overpressing, you know what I'm sayin'? I was hearing all kinda shit.

They can do whatever they want.

Exactly, exactly. They got your masters! So I was like, "Nah, we gonna press up our own shit." And that's why a lot of guys was complainin' about gettin' paid out there. We was gettin' our money, 'cause before I would fill another order, I'd need a check.

So you came in first as a rapper. How early on was that with Swishahouse?

Man, Swishahouse wasn't even formed then. Watts was doin' just regular speed mixtapes. I wanna say that was like '87, '88. Watts was like a senior in high school at the time I think.

He was just DJing. There wasn't a company involved.

Nah, there wasn't a company involved, and actually in the beginning I had more of the company aspect of the game, so I was thinking more of the label at the time when I did come back and Watts was doin' his mixtapes. My original plan was to take the artists that Watts was makin' hot on his mixtapes, but shit blew up so big that we just came together—did the company together.

So you first worked with him in the late '80s, when he was doing regular speed mixtapes, then you worked for the penitentiary for about eight years—when did you retire from there?

I retired from the penitentiary in about ... '99.

And you came straight in to Swishahouse from that?

Yeah, and actually I believe the whole year during '99, I was like actually helping Watts out, but then I start ... like I say, I was already studyin' the game as far as the business aspect of it, so I just put my money in it and we came together.

You did a lot of housecleaning when you came in, didn't you?

Yeah, I guess you could say that. You could say that.

Well by all contentions, you came in and straightened a lot of things out that others may not have had the foresight to correct.

Really, I'm not the type of person ... I won't necessarily hang you—I'll let you hang yourself. Everybody kinda like was weedin' theyself out. I was coming through moving forward, just continuing the work no matter who was down or who wasn't, and worked with the people that wanted to continue to work. But a lot of those guys just dropped off. And Slim Thug—he was never signed. So we've always worked good together even after that 'cause he was always basically like ... he was an artist on the mixtape scene with Swishahouse, but he was not signed to the label.

So he was paid for his appearances on the mixtapes, just not signed as an artist.

Yeah, and he sort of branched out ... Chamillionaire, Paul and Slim branched off and did they own thing, but we still had a working relationship, where they're still featured on our projects. But there was point, man ... where we didn't have *no* artists.

At which point?

I wanna say it's the point right before we signed Mike Jones and Magnificent. We didn't have no artists.

Because everybody was involved with the label, but not signed.

Yeah.

Had you released an album at that point?

We had released several albums. We had released *The Day Hell Broke Loose*, *Mista Masta Archie Lee* and we also had another artist by the name of Big Tiger. We released Big Tiger *I Came To Wreck*. T. Farris was just a youngsta up under my wing, actually just helping us out with everything we needed help with. But everybody just stepped they game up to another notch, and he took it upon hisself to go out there and find Mike Jones and Magnificent. I believe they was goin' to college together.

How did T. Farris begin to show you he had an ear?

I guess by him takin' his own initiative and recording Mike Jones and Magnificent, bringin' back the freestyles to Watts, and then he started beat shoppin'. He picked *good tracks*. I mean he had an ear for pickin' good tracks. We realized that because the first project he really A&Red was *First Round Draft Picks*, the Mike Jones and Magnificent [album].

He credits a lot of developing his ear to just being around the label, hearing everything you guys were doing.

And at the time, Watts was more like into puttin' his mixtapes out, but I more or less focused on gettin' the projects out, like three, four albums out back to back. Archie Lee and Big Tiger, I was A&Ring them projects.

How did you make the transition from mixtapes to albums? I mean, that's a totally different approach.

That was my focus from the beginning. We gotta get these albums out. If we plan to ever break as a label, we can't have 100 mixtapes and no albums out. We gotta have albums out to make the transition to a record label. You not a record label if you just puttin' out mixtapes.

To a lot of people, mixtapes don't even count as a part of a real catalog.

Right.

So which was the first album? Archie Lee?

Yeah … no, I take that back. The first album was *The Day Hell Broke Loose Part One*. That was '99, Archie Lee was 2000, Big Tiger was 2001. *First Round Draft Picks* came out in … I wanna say the beginning of 2003.

So what differentiated The Day Hell Broke Loose *from the mixtapes? That you marketed it differently?*

Yeah, it was a real commercial project. It wasn't underground. It was a real commercial project with real tracks, distribution.

You were working with Southwest at that point?

Yeah.

What year was it … 2003 that Southwest closed?

2003 I believe, because I had to go back and get all our product from 'em, and I believe they had got a little piece of *First Round Draft Picks* if I'm not mistaken.

Looking back on it now is different because back then it was so devastating that they closed, since a lot of labels had only worked with them as a distribution point, but some now see it as a blessing because they can work with multiple distributors.

I'ma show you … this is what's so different about my situation: I was *still* workin' with other distributors … we was workin' with Southwest and then we was workin' with independent distributors. You know you got these out the trunk distribution companies where these guys, they get 400, 500 pieces from you and they go workin' the streets, the stores, they got an internet set up. You know, the internet is the biggest thing happenin' right now as far as gettin' your product out there.

So it wasn't until after Southwest folded that you began to work with Select O and Gonzalez?

Yeah.

Because Southwest wanted exclusivity, didn't they?

The thing is, they knew our following, so I told them I wasn't gonna do exclusive with them, and I didn't do exclusive with Select O or Gonzalez. So I was dealin' with both of them direct.

They didn't allow that of a lot of labels.

Nah, if it woulda been a new label comin' out they probably wouldn'ta let them do it. But we had a track record. We sold records, and you know, that's what they do. They move these independent projects.

Once you started marketing The Day Hell Broke Loose, *that outsold the mixtapes, didn't it?*

Most definitely, but you know as the years went by, our mixtapes was growin' and growin' because of the colleges and military. You know these kids leave to go to school in California, New York, whatever. They from Texas, they take Swishahouse, Screw tapes, whatever's happenin' in they country. Same way like, somebody from New York, they go to school down here in Houston, they gonna bring what they used to listenin' to.

When you came in and became CEO, you took a lot off of Watts's shoulders…

Me and Watts both CEOs, but Watts handle more of the creative side, you know what I'm sayin'? I'm more of a business type. I get stuff done and don't let people bamboozle us, that kind of thing.

So what's the structure of the company now?

I got Michael Clarke doin' marketing and promotions, and then we got several people that assist us around the office also. They help us out with the shipping. We still got a small staff, but we tight.

When did the Asylum deal come through? Was that 2005?

I'm trying to think…we dropped *First Round Draft Picks*, we dropped *Freestyles 5* and we dropped *The Day Hell Broke Loose 2*.

That was the first time "Still Tippin'" appeared, right?

Yeah that was the first compilation "Still Tippin'" was on, and we had also shot that video and got that video up and runnin' before we signed that deal. I mean we had it runnin' on BET and MTV2. That was before the deal.

That was what sparked the deal then, wasn't it?

Yeah, 'cause that caused the whole *world* to start lookin' at Houston, when they seen our culture on film.

It was a very accurate snapshot. When did that video drop—late 2004?

It might have been late 2004.

I know the song was like a year old…

Yeah, it was old, it was old. But it wasn't old to the rest of the world.

It was a different beat, even, by the time it was released on that compilation, right?

What it was…it was a producer named Bigtyme we was workin' with that did a track up under it, but we ended up using the track that Salih [Williams] produced. The one with the violins.

So what all did the Asylum deal entail? I mean I know it puts you under the canopy of Warner and Atlantic, with the option to upstream artists to those labels—which is what you did with Mike and Paul…

It's basically like a P&D situation with an upstream agreement in it also.

So did it mean at that point that you retained control of the mixtapes and they just took over the albums?

Well, the mixtapes is in the streets. They don't have nothin' to do with those.

They couldn't control them if they wanted to.

Exactly, so they basically just deal with our artists, which are Mike Jones and Paul Wall.

But you're still cut in.

Yeah, on the P&D side, there's so many units it's gotta sell before it's upstreamed. We get paid on the P&D side for so many units, then after that it's upstreamed, and you know, the numbers change.

They upstreamed it right away, though.

Yeah, they upstreamed both our projects out the gate. I mean, because it was hot. We'd been dealin' with these guys for years.

There hasn't been an album released on Swishahouse since The Peoples Champ, *right?*

No, that was the last project we dropped. We got *The Day Hell Broke Loose 3* that's about to drop, and then we supportin' T. Farris with the TF Records thing, licensing our logo to TF Records and we supporting this whole Lil' Keke situation, and you got other artists such as Yung Redd and E-Class comin' out under that umbrella.

Besides Archie Lee and Coota Bang, are you actively looking for other new artists to bring in? Your roster's pretty short now, isn't it?

I think we good now, man. 'Cause we got Mike Jones, Paul Wall, Archie Lee, Coota Bang, Michael Watts and then our extended family ... Lil' Keke, Yung Redd, E-Class.

Has Asylum tried to exercise any control over who you're signing?

Nah. We don't *use* their A&Rs, we don't *listen* to their A&Rs. They can't tell us nothin' about our music 'cause they don't know this music, man. They sittin' out there in New York in big, tall skyscrapers, you know what I'm sayin'? They don't know what's goin' on down here, so when it comes to this music and our sound, I don't even take their opinions into consideration.

That was never a part of the deal, was it?

No it wasn't. 'Cause we got a proven track record. We know what we doin'.

What really is the Swishahouse aesthetic? What do you hear in an artist that tells you they're a Swishahouse artist?

Individuality. Don't sound like everybody else. Have his own unique sound. I get artists all the time run up on me, "Man, I sound like this person, I sound like that person." Man, we lookin' for individuals. That's what made the whole Houston scene stand out this past year, because it was something *different.* We wasn't rappin' over the same beats that was goin' around the industry from the same producers. We came in with a new formula, a new sound, and everybody gravitated toward that because they was hearin' somethin' new and fresh, that was original. So it made people key in on that and not pay attention to these people that was doin' what everybody else was doin'.

Houston didn't come to the mainstream—the mainstream came to Houston. What was missing from mainstream hip-hop that Houston was able to replace?

Something different, man. You see the same kinda girls all the time and then a beautiful Hawaiian girl walk into the crowd of them same girls, the Hawaiian girl gonna stand out, you know? 'Cause she look different, her beauty, her skin tone, her hair. So you gonna focus on her. Everybody else ... they just beautiful women but they all look alike.

It's also almost in a way that, because of the fact that Houston was ignored for so long, that the artists here had an advantage because they had time to perfect something so totally different while nobody was paying attention. By the time anybody else paid attention, everyone had been self-sufficient for years.

But really it's a second time coming for Houston, though, 'cause Rap-A-Lot did it back in the early '80s, mid-'80s. Really, I feel like we brought Houston back to having a second chance in the game. Houston already been on the map before, with the Geto Boys. That was a platinum group.

There's always been a sort of gentleman's agreement or relationship between Swishahouse and Rap-A-Lot. Does the fact that Mike Jones has purportedly signed a management deal with them change anything, or is that just business?

Oh, nah. It's business with us.

But he's still on the label.

Mike Jones is still signed to Swishahouse and we supportin' him 100 percent. As far as the business is concerned, if he don't drop an album, nobody makes money. Nobody's gonna benefit from it.

Were you surprised when he wanted to break ranks?

I wasn't surprised, but we don't have no ill feelings towards Mike Jones. He make money, we make money. It's business. This game is 95 percent business.

In the same way it's happened in Atlanta, do you think that a part of the hip-hop industry will begin to permanently root itself in Houston?

It's hard to say, you know, 'cause if we don't keep hot shit out there, pretty soon somebody else ... maybe in Wyoming, they culture might step up and all the limelight go to them. You know, this hip-hop thing jumps around, man. I remember one time when New York was hot, I remember one time when West

Coast was hot, I remember one time when Miami was hot ... the Midwest, St. Louis was hot. So to me, it just jumps around.

Do you think that if that national attention goes away, it'll just snap back to the way it was?

Yeah, 'cause I honestly ... and other artists will probably tell you this ... deals have been comin' across our tables for a minute. We didn't jump at the first deal 'cause, like you say, this whole hip-hop thing was supportin' itself, guys down here moving mixtapes and get $8 a unit whereas up on the East Coast they might get like $2 or $3 for a mixtape. But I mean these guys was wholesalin' mixtapes for $8. They wasn't thinkin' about no deal. That's why it took Slim Thug so long to sign a deal. We was already makin' money.

That said, do you think the landscape here has changed now? Do you think that the kids coming up are going to view the game differently than even this generation that came right before them?

I think so because you know what? Actually, now it's flooded. To me, it's flooded right now. There's about a million kids handing you a demo or a mixtape that they done put out. It's just saturated now.

Do you think that's a good thing, that it's going to bring out more talent that you wouldn't otherwise hear?

It's gonna be hard to find it now 'cause now instead of listenin' to maybe a 100 mixtapes, I gotta listen to about 500 mixtapes before I come across *that guy.* But usually we like to look at the guys that's out here hustlin' and building a buzz on they own, sorta how the majors do it. They don't just go and pick a label 'cause they wanna sign a label. They lookin' for a label that's workin' and hustlin' and is buildin' its own buzz and its own movement. So them the kinda guys we lookin' for.

Because every once in a while, those guys could actually be really good at what they're doing—Paul and Cham could have been hustling the way they were and still not have been good at what they were doing.

Yeah but they was good at what they was doin' and they built a buzz, a fanbase, which caused people to be interested in 'em. 'Cause you got guys walk up to you nowadays just off the streets and say, "Hey, man, I rap, man. I want a record deal." They ain't been in no studio, ain't made no demo. They don't wanna pass out a flyer with they own picture on it, right?

You gotta have some ...

Self-motivation.

Through that, do you think that the passion and the work ethic is greater or less now?

I think with some of the kids it is, 'cause I see them every weekend in the club, passin' out they CDs. I see some of the same ones comin' up to me sayin', "Hey G, I'm out here workin'. I'm out here workin'." So some of them, they tryin' to grind it out. But like I say, you got some that—they want you to hand it to 'em.

So you have three new releases coming out this year, then.

Yeah, we got the Paul Wall *Get Money, Stay True.*

Okay I've seen like two or three different titles for that one.

You know what? First we was gonna run with *Ain't No 401(k) For A Hustler*, but that's gonna probably end up bein' a mixtape that lead up to *Get Money, Stay True.* It's gonna be a mixtape-style CD. But the *Get Money, Stay True* is gonna be his actual album title.

That's gonna come out in the fall?

Yeah. We're projecting right now late September. He's actually in the studio workin' on it right now, so we're tryin' to get it together. As a matter of fact, I gotta go to New York to sit down at some promotion and marketing meetings with Atlantic to go over Paul's upcoming projects so we can know how to set it up and position it before the fall release.

Who's he working with on the production?

Mr. Lee, and I know he's gettin' some tracks from Pretty Todd at the Gridiron House.

He's been working with him for a while, hasn't he?

Yeah. So I don't know what other producers. T. Farris—I don't know if he done got any other producers at this time. Those the only two I know of at this time.

So he's pretty much sticking with his formula then.

That's a big thing with me, man. I feel like we gotta stick with our same formula. I don't think we should get in the game and change our style at all. I think we should stick to what we been doin'. You know, some people like to jump in the game and switch it up and then they shit flop and then they wonder why. I been stickin' with the same formula. I been using Mike Frost, which is our designer, since day one. I been using Dr. Teeth to do my videos, 'cause I mean he started in the game with us. So, I don't believe in changin' up the formula. We feel like whoever we bring in, we can make 'em a star. Whoever we bring in, we can take 'em to that next level.

When I spoke about the roster being short—do you like it short or do you want it to expand to where you're eventually working with 20 or so artists?

I'd like to do a gradual growth. I don't wanna just go sign 20 dudes …

No I just mean further down the road, as Swishahouse expands … or do you always just want it to be a handful of artists, a small family?

I'd like to definitely expand 'cause I'd also like to do different types of music also. If we can get an R&B artist, if we can find a rock artist … I wanna have a versatile type of company. I don't know if you remember it but we used to have a slogan … "Major Without A Major Deal."

Of course.

That was our gold, man. We never really anticipated on signin' with a major, man. We was tryin' to get to that level where we could move units like a major on an independent level, so that's why we had that slogan out there, "Major Without A Major Deal."

But you still work the same way.

Yeah, yeah. We still act like we're independent because we still … I still press up a lot of our promotional materials. Atlantic didn't press up all of Paul Wall's promotional materials. Swishahouse did. We pressed up the flyers, the posters. I got a lot of the merchandise, like the t-shirts and stuff for promotional use. We printed and pressed up all that stuff ourselves.

I'm sure it would have taken months through their levels of bureaucracy to get that done. You've been doing it for years.

Yeah we don't wait on nobody. We just keep grindin'.

(2006)

Salih Williams

PRODUCER · AUSTIN, TX

As the producer of the breakthrough hit "Still Tippin'," Salih will forever be connected to the H-town juggernaut of 2005, though he is also known for his extensive work with the late Big Moe and Wreckshop Records. He continues to produce at his studio near Austin under the name Carnival Beats.

So you're in Austin now, right?

Yeah Austin, Houston. Back in the day when Screw music started jumpin' up in Houston, that's when I was goin' back and forth from Austin to Houston, workin'. I did a lot of work ... basically I was pretty much livin' in Houston at one point.

That was when you first started working with Wreckshop, '99 or so?

Yeah, back in like '99 and then we just kind of ... it was just back and forth, you know? Never actually lived in Houston, just outskirts and Austin and then I was livin' out here in the country for a minute.

Yeah you have a studio in Luling, right?

I have a little store out there, but actually, right now I'm living in Kyle, Texas. So I'm not actually, not even in Austin or Luling. I'm like 10 minutes outside of Austin. Just workin' out of the house, doin' my own thing.

So when you were coming to Houston in '99, 2000, that's when you were working with Big Moe. Were you ever working with Pat, too?

Actually, I never did get a chance to work with Pat. I kinda ... we did some remixes towards the end but I came right when Pat had passed away. I think it was like two years after he had died I came to Wreckshop. Moe was over there. Moe had just got signed over to Wreckshop. He was coming basically from the SUC. He was freestylin' on a lot of they stuff, singin'. And I contacted ... actually got in contact with Reck—D-Reck, Wreckshop CEO—when I was here in San Marcos. I met them at a show and basically, you know, let 'em hear some tracks and he was like, "Man, why don't you come up?" So I came up one night, actually one night they had a show and I just kinda got in the studio with them and ... man, they had just signed Moe over there at Wreckshop, so it was perfect timin'. Actually, Moe was new to Wreckshop and then I was new, you know what I'm sayin'? So that was like the first project we attacked, was Big Moe.

How did you approach that? I mean you had been working with rappers before, and Moe is a rapper, but he's so different, you know?

Moe always looked at himself as a singer, you know. Moe woulda did a Luther Vandross album if he could've. But we were like, "No, Moe, you still gotta rap. You still gotta be street. Gutter." We used to approach it basically just like an R&B project with more of a street edge to it. And then a lot of writers came in, you know, Z-Ro wrote some stuff, a bunch of people just came in to help make his little sound. But Moe pretty much had that style anyway. That sang/rap kinda style. He just came out, you know?! We did a lot of remakes, remakes of just old school remakes, just changed up the lyrics, kept the melody the same, changed up the lyrics. Pretty cool, man. Worked out, though.

Growing up so close by, you had to have known what was going on in Houston over the years. How much did that history affect how you looked at it—did you feel like there was a Houston sound you had to shoot for?

Well basically I came doing tracks ... I was out on the West Coast doin' a lot of tracks in Phoenix and L.A. and everything, so when I came to Houston I kinda brought like a little of the West Coast ... some of the songs that I was presentin' to 'em ... the way I felt like, why should I come to Houston and try and do what Houston is doin'? I felt like I should bring a new element. So I never really got caught up in the Houston sound. Even though it was jumpin', I was just bringin' something that I felt like I would like. And it was a mix between some West Coast type flavors ... like when I did [Big Moe's] "Purple Stuff," it had that little bounce. That, plus the carnival kind of symbolizes fun music. That's what I was doin' back then. I would consider us like havin' fun. The carnival ... I don't know why I came up with it but it just fit. Because some of the licks I used to do on the keyboard just ...

That's how you got the name, Carnival Beats?

I grew up playing jazz all my life on keyboards, so I've been playin' since I was seven. And I studied different jazz licks. Some of the licks that I really did like had that little *bow-bow*, and I started to integrate that into my tracks. And it worked out, though! Kinda cool though. And like I said, I never really got caught up in the Houston sound. I loved it, though. But I didn't feel like I was just gonna come up there and take over. That's not what I was tryin' to do. I was just tryin' to add another element.

And they were open to that, then. It wasn't like they were trying to get you to do one thing.

Yeah, nah, and they respected that this is what this producer brings, and that's what he brings, you know. That's the good thing, you know, a lot of people will want you to bring a certain sound based on ... because this is what's goin' on, "Man, you gotta do this. You gotta do this because this is what's happenin'." Wreckshop wasn't like that. D-Reck already was takin' a chance on just bringin' in Big Moe and putting out a kind of R&B rap record. Everything was straight hardcore rap then. So he was takin' a chance, you know. He was a chance taker. So we tried different stuff and it happened. That's the key about a label. If you look at radio now, everything startin' to sound the same, you know? Everybody usin' this T-Pain voice, I mean Lil' Wayne ... come on, man, let Lil' Wayne do his thing. All the other elements, man. I would blame it also on the labels, too, because they're afraid of steppin' out too far in case they don't get a hit.

And people coming out with some really thin tracks.

Yeah! Yeah. Exactly. Let me tell you, dude. It's gotten to a point where ... when I signed my deal over at Universal as a songwriter ... right now I've been doin' a lot of pop stuff, man. R&B. I just signed ... I started my label, I just signed a guy named Evan Phelps. Evan Phelps is like the next John Mayer. This little kid is 22-years-old, man. White kid. Phenomenal. Plays guitar, sings, songwriter. So right now I'm not sayin' I'm steppin' back from rap but I've started seein' that ... people need to get out there and try something different. I mean just like when I did "Still Tippin'" and some of the Mike Jones stuff back then, a bunch of the record labels would call me and say like, "Could we get a beat like "Still Tippin'?" and I'm like "That's 'Still Tippin''. That's that beat. That's that beat, man. Leave me alone." And that's what happenin' with a lot of these labels, man. Take for instance ... T-Pain come out with a hit. What's gonna happen is that everything that comes out now, all these labels are gonna say, "Well, we need a song like this. T-Pain, he's killin' the airwaves." You know, so everybody out there sound like T-Pain. It's not growin', man. There's no growth right now.

Why do you think people connected so much with that beat [for "Still Tippin'"]?

At the time when I did that track, Lil' Jon was really big. You know, all his stuff was bassy, bassy and in a real club ... I think at the time Houston was at a point where it was at that level like, "Either we gonna follow this Atlanta sound, or we gonna follow this ..." you know, whatever sound it was they were looking for. But I think that came at a time, when I did "Still Tippin'," I was definitely not tryin' to make a Lil' Jon track, or whoever was hot at the time ... it just worked, man. It may have not been the tightest track, it don't necessarily have to be the tightest track, but it has to just stand out. There has to be something unique about it. And I think that's the key, you know, the strings ... and it just worked. It was cool timin', man. And I always tell people ... I don't never stand back and say I got the tightest track, you know. I just think that I tried to do somethin' a little gimmicky for rap that people can identify with. Kinda repetitious. But it just was good timin'. The track came at a good time and like I said, Houston was at a level of tryin' to figure out where ... where the rap game fittin' to go. Mike [Jones] had just signed his deal, and Mike was like ... I was turnin' in records to Swishahouse and they was like, "Damn, it's cool, though. But we need somethin' like this ..." And I knew what they was talkin' about. They wanted some Lil' Jon, basically. I was like, "Yeah, man, but I don't ... I don't do them beats." Lil' Jon ... every drum he has loaded up on his pad, that's catered to his sound. The drums that I load up on my pad are catered to *my* sound, you know what I mean? So I have to go in and start jackin' sounds and kicks and that's not what I wanna do. But what happened, they had turned in the record and they had like two tracks of mine on the Mike Jones record. But they turned it in to Warner Brothers, and they had heard "Still Tippin'," Warner Brothers had heard it and from what I heard they told me Warner Brothers was like ... 'cause they had got some tracks from Lil' Jon, they had some Atlanta producers ... so the record sounded like Houston rappers with Atlanta music, basically. And Warner Brothers was like, "Man ... no, no, no, no, no, no. We want Atlanta groups, we gonna sign Atlanta groups!" You know what I'm sayin'? And that's what it was. They was like, "Well, what's up with this song? Why does this song sound so different from the rest of the record? We like this. We like 'Still Tippin'.' We like 'Back Then.'" So that's when they had called me. They said, "You know, Salih, we gonna have to go more with your sound." I said, "Man ... *our* sound." This was for *us*, you know?

It was an interesting time, Houston exploding in 2005, but don't you think that Houston had its own sort of national stage within Houston before that?

Yeah, the underground. We've always had a solid underground market. Face and them came and was blowin' up at one point, you know, Geto Boys. They had time to really shine but it kind of died out after Face and Geto Boys really stopped just putting out a bunch of records. But the good thing is that we always had an underground. We always had people that supported the local rappers even if we weren't sellin' nationally or didn't have a major video out or anything. We always felt like we were on top of our game. As far as we were concerned, we were on top of our game based on the underground level. We were makin' money ... Slim Thug was makin' big money and didn't even have a video out on BET, didn't have no type of major deal. So, cats always felt like we was on our game, but nationally, we were lackin'. And I think Mike Jones, Paul Wall, will always—definitely with Bun and Scarface, who basically paved the way—that gave us a national look. And I think Mike Jones at the time, Mike was like the first platinum-selling young, new rapper who really didn't have a lot of history in them streets. Mike didn't have a big name prior to that, you know, he was just doin' a lot of underground stuff, but he really wasn't big, man. And it kinda made people look at him like, "Damn, man, what the hell?

This kid wasn't really … he wasn't payin' dues." But he had the right song at the right time and he had a new energy. He had a nice little gimmick and he could sell. He could sell.

Going back to the Wreckshop days … Screw was still alive when you were with Wreckshop.

Oh yeah. Definitely, man.

Did he chop and screw any of the beats that you did?

You know, it was crazy because I'm sure he touched a lot of stuff, man, because I would come up and do tracks … and it was like a job, man, pretty much. I would come up on weekends and I would stay the whole weekend and just work, man. And Screw would be there and he would have CDs and I'm sure … I just never really … it was like we never really hashed, man, because he was always there. I don't know, man! I'm sure he touched some stuff, I just could never tell you which ones he done. But I'm sure he came through and touched up a couple of things for us.

Well did he chop and screw versions of them, though?

Ah, you know, I never really heard nothin'. I never really knew. I'm sure he grabbed some stuff. Screw would grab anything, you know? I mean I'd have to go back and get those CDs and search all the crates. I'm sure he did, though. Knowin' Screw, I know he did.

Did you ever go over to one of the sessions at his house?

Never, man. Actually, Screw was like … when I came to Wreckshop, Screw was like … you know, Screw music was kind of … everybody was bootleggin' it, so Screw was kinda gettin' to a point where he was wantin' to just get more into doin' records, doin' Screw CDs. So Screw was comin' to Wreckshop a bunch, man, and I was kind of around showin' him a lot of little things on MPC. I showed him a lot of things on MPC because he was wantin' to actually get into *producin'* producing. Instead of doin' turntables. So I think at the time when I came, Screw was just trying to pretty much transition himself as well. And that's what I saw, man. So the sessions at his house were weird, man. His sessions at the house … I think they was pretty much kinda dyin' out, but he was still doin' it. It just wasn't really big big at the time.

He had moved out to Mo City at that point, too, right?

Yeah, yeah he had moved. I really didn't … when I would come up there I would pretty much just hang out … people would come through … Pokey, and everybody would come through. Hawk. Everybody. It was pretty much … everybody came here, you know? We never really had to leave the shop. 'Cause Wreckshop was real hot then, man. Wreckshop was hot.

Who really stood out to you at that time?

At the time I would say … I always took a liking to Pokey, really. Pokey would come through, man, he was always jolly, had a good attitude, crazy. Moe, too, man, 'cause if you knew Moe, man … Moe had a real … just a good attitude, man. He would have you laughin' up under the table by the time you walked out of the room with him.

He was really smart, too.

Yeah! Moe was smart! Lemme tell you one thing about Moe: The good thing about Moe, the reason why I think Moe kept a lot of people that really loved him is 'cause Moe was one of those artists that … he would talk to anybody. He stood outside of the club, stood outside of the show … we used to have to tell him, "Moe, come on get onstage!" He out there talkin' to somebody … you know, somebody had a CD. He wanna hear it. He gonna try and play it. "Moe, you gotta get onstage!" He was real sincere, man. But everybody, man … like I said, I had came during a time … I had a real good time when I was over there, man. They had a lot of good people who came through but the ones that really stayed around are the ones you pretty much hear about now … the Pokeys, the Hawks, Moe … Slim, Flip. I ain't never … I never seen Mike [Jones] over at Wreckshop, but Mike wasn't really doin' nothing …

Yeah he wasn't really around yet.

He wasn't around. I had seen him once before … he was a little short guy. I'm 35-years-old, see. Back then those cats was 23-years-old. Right now ... you go back eight years, that takes a chunk off they life right there ... they were like 13, 14-years-old.

When you and I graduated high school, those dudes weren't even in school yet.

Nah, they wasn't even in school! They wasn't into rappin', they was more so into like ... kids' stuff. But you know, everybody really kinda had a chance to gel over there. It was a cool session. I had a great time over there. Came from there, started doin' work with Swishahouse, and I kinda like started surfin' around. Actually I went over to Freestyle Kingz and was doin' some stuff with Chalie Boy.

Isn't Chalie Boy from up near Dallas?

Actually they were in Huntsville at the time. And then I went from there ... from Huntsville, that's when Bull, the owner of Dirty Third ... they connected me with Swishahouse, and that's when I met Watts. He came down to Huntsville one time and I met Watts ... Watts was like, "Hey, we got this poppin', got this boy Mike and Paul." I was like, "Cool, man I'll shoot y'all some tracks." I shot 'em some tracks, "Still Tippin'" was on that beat CD I gave 'em, along with some other tracks. And they put out *The Day Hell Broke Loose*, and it took off underground ... before you know it, "Still Tippin'" just went there and went there and before you knew it, it got added to where it became one of Mike's biggest singles, Slim's biggest single, Paul Wall's biggest single. It really jumpstarted they careers, man. It started their careers, man. People still send me texts, "Man, you bust 'em over with that one." It was different, though! And trust me, Lance, I got a lotta heat still that can bring back that same element like that, but right now I'm just kinda waitin' to see what's gonna happen with this Houston and Texas rap. I think what we need to try and do it, stop bein' hit chasers and start bein' hit *makers*. A lot of us chasin' hits, man. Someone will make a beat, we chase that. And then we not ... we not really tryin' to create a sound down here, man. We gotta create that movement. Like we did back then, man! We had a movement back then, man. Right now, people ... they not even sellin' underground CDs like they used to down here, man. It's not even jumpin' off like that anymore man. But it's comin' back.

(2007)

Bun B

RAPPER · PORT ARTHUR, TX

As one half of the duo UGK (along with the late Pimp C), Bun has become an ambassador for both Port Arthur and his adopted hometown Houston over the years. UGK was the original signee on Bigtyme Recordz in the early '90s, later inking a deal with Jive and gaining national recognition, which exploded years later when Jay-Z asked them to appear on his 2000 hit "Big Pimpin'." Upon Pimp C's incarceration in 2002, Bun became a solo artist and a much more vocal public figure as "Free Pimp C" became a battle cry for the city. UGK reformed to great critical acclaim upon Pimp C's release in December of 2005, and remained active until his untimely death two years later. Interview conducted at Timmy Chan on Cullen Boulevard in South Park.

What do you think makes Houston such a hustle town?

I think the fact of the placement of the city itself… being that it's basically, like as far as the South is, we're dead center in America, and I think with us being just as far from L.A. as we are from New York… to even think of trying to achieve in those regions, or at least making and taking what *you* do here that far, it's almost like a pipe dream. For years, nobody ever had an outlet for this type of thing, so the grind was already there. None of these guys ever thought they'd ever get a major recording deal. Most of them had seen people try before them, most of them had tried themselves and it just wasn't going to happen. So a lot of these cats learned to make what they needed to make happen outside of the system, and by the time the system came into play, they weren't just a new artist looking for a deal—they were businessmen, looking for joint venture deals and distributions. These cats came in—whereas most kids 19, 20-years-old come in pretty blind to the game, never having sold a contract, never having dealt with a wholesaler, never having dealt with retail, never having dealt with radio or video or magazines and so forth—a lot of these cats learned how to deal with these things on their own, without help from anyone. No publicists, no A&R, no marketing, promotion department. So that when these things come into play, they know exactly not only *what* they want to do, but *how* they want to do it. These cats are going to the promotion department and being able to say, "Well, look… this is how we've been promoting this company and the image of this product for the past four years, so if you're gonna come onboard, then this is what we're doing. You need to just play along with it," as opposed to just going to the promotion department of a label and saying, "How are we gonna sell this?" Artists in Houston, more than most other regions—I won't say *any* other region, but more than most other regions—are primarily businessmen first. They took all the fun out of this shit for us here. All the … making a record, going somewhere and giving them your demo, hope you get a deal—we did that shit. We tried that shit for years. Got turned down … every door slammed in your face. So we just said "fuck it," and it's that "fuck it" mentality that gets these cats these great deals and they can take advantage of the game like they want to.

Why do you think it was turned down so long? Do you think that because of the geography nobody took Houston seriously, or the quality of the music?

Well, for one ... I'm not going to say the quality of the music because we've been making good music out here for years, capable to stand on any level. I think the problem is that when you have a record label based in New York, the majority of your employees are probably going to be New Yorkers. And with them not really understanding the South—the scene, the area, the people or the music—they're going to be less adept to want to grab on to it and take a chance on it because they don't know what it is. So, it was a lot easier for a lot of these A&Rs and VPs or whatever to sign New York people or to sign L.A. people, somebody they knew from their area, like, "I'm from Brooklyn, he from Brooklyn, he got Brooklyn hot right now so we'll just sign him. It's easier." For us to sign a deal, every time we have a problem with the label we gotta get on a plane and fly 12–1500 miles, 3,000 miles just to deal with the issues. So I think geography and how far we were away from the companies, but also just a lot of lazy A&Rs and shit. Just taking the easiest thing, the closest thing to them. Nobody wanted to take a chance on the music down here.

What finally woke them up?

I think the Screw sound. First of all, they knew that Rap-A-Lot Records was putting out good music, but everybody down here wasn't able to sign with Rap-A-Lot. I think the Screw sound and the fact that somebody like Screw was selling these thousands of mixtapes and people were getting all of this big local fame and were starting to get radio fame and shit off of mixtape songs. Guys started to put albums out without really ... in the beginning most of them didn't really know what they were doing but they took chances and were selling 40 [to] 50,000 units based on this type of stuff. Any major label can see that, "If these guys can sell 40 or 50,000 on their own with no real promotion ... then imagine what they can do if we put *our* force behind them." I think the Screwed Up sound probably was the first thing ... and I tried to tell my label years ago—even with *Ridin' Dirty,* we tried to convince them to put out a screwed and chopped version of *Ridin' Dirty* and they didn't understand. Shit just took a little time, and I think with the internet ... the age of the internet made the world a lot smaller and made these distances minute. Literally, there is no 3,000 miles between me and New York now. With e-mail, the internet and shit like that, it's instantaneous, it's automatic.

Because of what's happened with our city in the last year, and with the fact that a lot of these artists are businessmen, do you think the game has changed for them?

Yeah, definitely. I think the approach is, "You know what? They probably don't like us, they probably don't really feel our music, they probably don't understand what we're saying, and not because they can't but because they don't *want* to. I'm not even gonna concern myself with it. I'm gonna make my music strictly for the people that I know wanna hear it, make my money and get up outta there." If they wanna try to come down here and use us to latch on to the Southern music buying market, it's gonna cost them, because we're already tied into the market and we don't need them to get our music to the people.

The artists are wise to it.

Absolutely. Been wise to it. To a certain extent, we had no other choice but to *get* wise to it. If we wanted to make a living off of music then we had to go out there, make relationships with retail stores, and had to make relationships with one-stop wholesalers and shit just to get this shit heard, man. A lot of this shit was done on faith and from the heart ... just believing what you were doing.

There's been a lot of bleedover from the newer Houston artists—people hearing one and then checking out the others. Do you think that's going to bleed over backwards and renew interest in the generations of Houston artists that came before them like Klondike Kat and K-Rino?

I would hope so. But you know, these artists, like the K-Rinos, the Klondikes, the PSKs, the Point Blanks … a lot of people that I know that are coming back into the game, they've got to do the best that they can to tie themselves in to the younger cats. A lot of these younger cats look up to all of us, so all I did was to go to the cats that I knew respected me as an artist and as a person, and asked them to make music with me and get on their stuff. Everybody's not going to be that easy, everybody's not going to be that receptive to it, but I think the possibility is there. I think being from Houston right now and saying you're a Houston rap artist and if you can get one good co-sign from somebody that pretty much everybody knows is from Houston, reppin' Houston right now, you can sell easily 40 or 50,000 units. Worldwide. And you're an independent artist, all that money yours, man that's good money man.

How do you maintain a sense of social responsibility in your lyrics and still retain street credibility?

Well even in the streets there's codes that you have to go by. And we tend to stick to that script. We honor the streets, honor the code of the streets and we honor the people in the streets. And the people in the streets change but the streets don't change, and the rules in the streets don't change. So as long as we go by the rules in the street and respect the people in the street doing what they do, they will always stand up for us. UGK has always represented the underdog. There's always going to be more underdogs than top dogs. UGK has always spoken for those who can't speak for themselves. The silent majority. That's who we represent. So we will always be heard and there will always be this force behind that. A lot of people don't understand, but it's always going to be there, because these people are sittin' here, they're hurtin', they're tired and they're misrepresented and they want somebody to stand up for it. And that's usually what we try to do. There's a lot of … people talk about the candy paint, the cars, the lifestyle or whatever but they don't talk about the hardships of the people living the lifestyle, then even people inside the lifestyle that can't live it to the fullest. Like everybody out here doesn't have a candy car, everybody out here doesn't have swangers. Everybody can't afford it. I can afford it, but there's shit I want that I can't afford, so I constantly let people know, "I'm doing all right, but I'm still not where I *wanna* be." Everybody can relate to that. That's the struggle of the common man and that's what UGK tries to represent. And the common man nine times out of ten is always getting fucked over. So we'll always have that class of people to represent.

(2006)

Paul Wall

RAPPER · NORTHSIDE

The first rapper in Houston with a #1 album on the Billboard charts, Paul was a big part of the explosion of national recognition that Houston was feeling in the fall of 2005, with his breakthrough album The Peoples Champ. *He started out as an intern of sorts with Swishahouse, working his way up through the street team to appearances on mixtapes with his partner Chamillionaire and their group The Color Changin' Click, with whom he would release multiple albums and then have a quiet, but public falling out (the two later reconciled). Paul Wall made headlines in the rap world again in 2010 when he underwent gastric bypass surgery and lost over 100 pounds.*

I was reading about your surgery—I guess you got it in 2010?

Actually I got it on New Year's ... on New Year's Eve, 2009, so like January ... I got out the hospital January 1, 2010.

I was reading some of the interviews you did after that, and you're real open about it, in explaining it to people—did you experience some fans connecting with you on that? Some people who got inspired to go the same route?

Yeah, definitely. Fans and also other entertainers, too. For me, the reason I wanted to be so open about it was because of all the ... I don't know the wording, but the way it was perceived, to get surgery like that, as being *vain*. And for me, it wasn't for that purpose solely. You know, part of it is I wanna look good, but it wasn't like, you know, I'm gettin' 1,000 plastic surgeries on my face and you walk around looking like a fish. For me, I'm trying to save my life here, but at the same time better my life *and* feel good about myself. And ... I don't know, I just wanted other people to feel like ... shit, because anytime I see people who have the surgery, they're always real quiet about it or kinda seem ashamed of it. And they don't want people to know. But I feel completely the opposite. Like, I'm *proud* that I got the surgery. Shit, if you see how I look before and how I look now, I look like a million bucks. That's how I'm feelin', too. So I'm proud that I got the surgery because of the results of how I feel as a person but also, I would hope to inspire somebody else to know that there's another side to it. It's not just the embarrassed, the shamed side people get, because people will be like, "Oh, he got surgery—that don't count." Not talking about me, but talking about people that had surgery like that. There's always something negative that goes along with it. But me, I want to portray it in a positive light, to let people know that *you* can have surgery, too. And if it wasn't for a good friend of mine that helped motivate me to wanna—because I wanted to make a change, and I was doing everything in my power to try to lose weight, but where I was at it was ... if I wouldn't have had the surgery by now, I would have probably been another 100 pounds heavier, just 'cause the lifestyle I was livin'. And even though I made dramatic lifestyle changes, I wasn't losing any weight. So, I don't know... I just wanted people to know there's more to it than that. There's another side to it. You know, I don't feel like there's nothin' wrong with gettin' the surgery. I was 320 pounds!

Wow.

Yeah! I just wanted people to—I was just hoping that I could shed a different light on it, and I'm proud that I had the surgery. Because like I said, if I wouldn't have had the surgery, man I don't know if I would be alive today, because I was morbidly obese.

I didn't realize 320 pounds. That's wild.

Yeah, and the doctor told me that if you're 50 pounds overweight, it takes 15 years off your life. I was over 100. I was like 120, 130 pounds overweight. Overweight. So you just think of all the other stuff that comes along with it: diabetes—which... I was borderline diabetic—I had hypertension, high blood pressure, my metabolism's fucked up... you know...

All that sneaking up on you before you're even 30.

Shit, hell yeah! Gettin' on planes feelin' dizzy, performin', feelin' like I'm about to pass out. You know, as I'm performing, *praying,* "Man, I hope I don't pass out because I'm gonna be so embarrassed if I fall down on stage." Stuff like that. So I mean, it was... for me, if it wasn't for my homeboy motivating me to do it, it kinda... he was tellin' me, "Man, ain't nothin' wrong with that surgery. Don't be thinkin' you should be embarrassed by that," you know, that I'm gettin' that surgery. If it wasn't for him encouraging me to do it, then I probably wouldn'ta did it, and I might not *be* here! And everybody woulda been talkin' about me, "Aw, man, Paul shoulda... man, he was too big—why didn't he get surgery?" That's bullshit. They don't say that 'til you die.

Yeah. Look at Big Moe.

Yeah, yeah. Exactly, man. Exactly.

But you're not the only one, and we look at people like Slim, he's also trimming up, and then [Killa] Kyleon—do you feel like it's an overall thing, do you feel like there's kind of a movement towards a health consciousness in rap music or in Houston in particular?

I think yeah, definitely, and some of that comes from watchin' our heroes fall. First from DJ Screw, and Pimp C, and then Big Moe, and all of them are health-related. Drug kinda-related.

Lifestyle-related.

Yeah, just lifestyle-related. I was living that *same* lifestyle that they're livin', even though some of us might be doin' the drugs a little more than others, some of us might be eatin' unhealthily a little more than others, some of us might be exercising a little less than others, but we're all livin' the same lifestyle, and it just has an affect on you, where any of us are vulnerable to that, and you don't realize it until it's too late. Or until it's damn *near* too late.

And then it's a real uphill climb.

Yeah, exactly, man, and part of—you know, when you get your health together, a lot of it has to do with momentum, the momentum you have with it. And if you feel like the battle is lost already, and you don't have any hope for it, it just makes it that much tougher to overcome.

Because you're depressed about it.

Yeah—exactly! Oh hell yeah, and then the stress and the depression that goes along with it just adds to everything else—adds to the lower metabolism, it adds to anxiety, you know, strokes, heart attacks, things like that. And then plus the fact that we all have kids makes us wanna live much longer for, not just for ourselves but for our *kids*, and not just so we can be around our kids, but so that our kids can be around *us*. Because, being that my wife—she lost her dad a few years ago. I guess it was about four years ago now, you know, she lost her dad. And I'm sure he would love to be here to be with *her*, but on the other side, she wants *him!* She wanted him to be here for *her*. So, you know, I don't want my kids thinkin', "Damn, man, what the hell is my dad doin'? You know, why he couldn't he get his shit together? Why he ain't just go get the surgery, why he ain't just do whatever he had to do to lose this weight?" So I could be there with them. And that's something that we're doin' right now, me and Slim, I think Kyleon doin' it, too. And my wife's doin' it, too. She's got a whole health blog, recipes, everything. She does Zumba classes. But we're doing it with this company... where they're basically just tryin' to make some kind of... just like some kind of urban initiative to show that people who you look up to, who you might not necessarily perceive as "all around American guys..." you know, if you listen to our music, it's not the most G-rated. We don't live a G-rated lifestyle. But at the same time, we're still getting healthy and trying to be an inspiration to other people. To let them know that you can be yourself, but also make changes in your life. And part of that, for me, too, was when we moved to California—we lived in California for the last two years, and in the summer we moved back to Houston, this past summer. So, bein' out there, man, I was—me and my boy Travis Barker, we'd go do M.A. training together, so he would exercise every week, a few times a week, and I'd go with him. And that's just motivating, him being a vegan, and a lot of my other friends being vegans and vegetarians, and, you know, it just—part of me bein' a Texan makes me wanna, you know, tell jokes about vegans and vegetarians, but the other side of it is me wantin' to be healthy. It's actually me bein' a thinker, asking, "Why are you a vegan? Why are you a vegetarian? What's up, why you eatin' all this organic food, man, when they chargin' three times as much for a carton of milk?" And it's the same thing. But then they explain to you all of the benefits of it, and the things that we're eatin', and all the unhealthy things that we're eatin', from fast food and processed food, meat fillers and stuff like that, and all the corn syrup and all that kinda stuff that's just killing your body and killing our generation after generation, it's... man, it's incredible that it's allowed to go on like this. It's incredible to me that there's no laws, preventative laws, that's makin' it happen. But, me bein' in California, though, it just really made me change my lifestyle because, man, nowhere in California has a drive-thru, except In-N-Out, and even all the In-N-Outs don't have drive-thrus. But the Starbucks don't have drive-thrus, the *banks* don't have drive-thrus, the restaurants don't have drive-thrus, *nothin'*. Man, in *Houston*, you can go to the bank... I mean, shit, you know, you can go to any restaurant—*any* restaurant, period—you can go to Ruth's Chris and call in a order and they'll bring it out to you. You don't even have to get out of your car. You pay for it from the window of your car.

For real.

And that just promotes a lazy lifestyle. It's *convenient*, but it's also lazy as a motherfucker. I mean, shit, liquor stores, shit, have drive-thrus. It's just so lazy. But the girls are thicker, and we want a thick girl, because that's fine to us. The girls want a thick dude. If you boney, then they talk about, "I don't want his boney ass." That's what girls say. They want somebody that's got a little meat on they bones. I mean, it's just a cultural thing, I guess.

What has it done for your creativity, as an artist? Has it unlocked things that weren't there before?

Oh definitely, man, because my delivery is—I have much more *breath*. So I don't have to take as many breaths, so it's helped my swag and my delivery. But also, onstage, like my boys that I perform with, they say, too, "Man, you can tell a big difference," in how it was and how I am now. Because, shit, before, I'd need all kind of hype men backin' me up in the background. I'd be out of breath, sweatin' hard as motherfucker. But now, I can go longer. I don't need to take as many breaths, you know what I'm sayin'. And in the studio, too, it helps with my delivery. My confidence is a lot better because my delivery can be there because I can hold more breath. But... one thing I was curious about, though, was, "Damn, I wonder if I have this surgery, am I gonna have a super high-pitched voice or some shit?" You know, "Am I gonna sound different? I know I'm gonna *look* different, but am I gonna *sound* different, too?"

And you don't.

And then, with the creativity, too, I mean I think a lot of it is mental, so since I have a different type of confidence now, shit, I feel like since I have the confidence there it's helping me be more creative. I don't know, I just have a better confidence, so shit, it's helpin' me be creative, to have that confidence that I mighta didn't have before.

And then your energy is better, too, so you work more, you create more. When you create more, you get better at it.

Definitely.

You've been married for six years now?

Yep. This'll be our—October will be our seventh year.

And two kids. How does the hustle mentality evolve as you evolve as a family man?

Man, it changes *completely,* because I'm not the same person I was seven years ago. I have different priorities, different goals, different wants. The things that—a lot of that comes from exhaustion, from like hustle exhaustion. But also, just because shit, man I been doin' this so long, you know, it used to be funner'n a motherfucker to go out and get fucked up and party, but now, it's like ... it don't really amuse me anymore like it used to because I been doin' it for so long. It's like, "Shit, I gotta find something else." And then, as you get older, you learn, you grow, so I've become a smarter individual. I know more about things. When you young, you don't give a fuck. So you can get fucked up, you know, and it's *funny*. "Man, we were throwin' up! Man, I drunk so much my throw up smelled like vodka!" But then, shit, you get older, your body and your organs don't work the same and it's like, "I can't ... damn, I can't be doin' that, man, 'cause I'ma feel it for three or four days."

Yeah.

And I gotta get up to take my son to school, and shit, I can't pull up to school smellin' like vodka and throwup. I was pullin' up to school smellin' like weed smoke, droppin' my son off at school man, all that kind of stuff. 'Cause you think about things that are *bigger* than you. Not just about me, it's about me bein' a leader for my family. And so my kids look to me, and I don't want them growin' up rememberin' the times—I watch a lot of those *Behind The Music* or *Driven* type of shows, where you see artists and you see their families—even the old, legendary artists, where they have passed on and they interview their kids, and I don't want my kids to be growin' up talkin' about, "Man, I remember the time my daddy used to come home ... he'd be smokin' this and that, he'd be drinkin', all ... be leaned out" and all this kind of stuff. So it just makes me wanna separate that from my family, from my kids. Because even though I don't perceive myself as a ... of course I'm a role model, but you don't even think of that. You don't *look* at yourself as a role model, you just look at yourself as livin' life and havin' fun and enjoyin' yourself. But, I think havin' kids makes you realize like, "Damn, I really am a role model," and whereas before, "Yeah, I'm a role model, but I don't give a fuck." Now, damn—the life I live is gonna directly affect how my children live *their* life. Because most kids'll either wanna be like their parents or wanna be the exact opposite of their parents. Shit, my biological dad was a junkie and he was abusive, so I wanted to be exactly the opposite of him. But shit, I turned into a codeine fiend. A codeine junkie. You know, so I damn near turned into the same as him. And he was addicted to heroin. Heroin and codeine are the same thing. They come from—not exactly the same, but they come from opiates.

Synthetic.

Yeah, so it's like—and a lot of that was scary to me. Like, growing up, my father, he was also an alcoholic, so I grew up in Alateen, going to meetings like that and all the AA-type meetings for kids. Alateen, you know, when your relative or someone who's an alcoholic or abusive. So, I was conscious and aware of addiction, and aware of the effects, so I didn't drink for a *long* time. I didn't do any drugs or anything for a long time, 'cause I was *afraid.* I was afraid that I was gonna turn into *him.* I didn't wanna be the dope fiend and the junkie. I didn't wanna be the alcoholic and beat on my wife and beat on my kids like that. So, shit, that was a big motivating force for me to *not* do that. I wanna be the exact *opposite* of him. But then as I get older, you know, the shit starts to be a little more temptin'. You know, you wanna try it. The next thing you know, shit, I *love* the shit, and it's hard to say no. But also, that's a big motivating force for me to stop, too, so … the benefit of me havin' surgery, too, is that my stomach is a lot smaller, so I can't drink nowhere near as much as I could before, because a couple of drinks will have me fucked up. Same with lean, everything. Except for smoking—I can smoke like a chimney and it don't affect me. But everything else, shit … man, I don't need to po' up a whole bunch of syrup. I can just drink just a little bit. Even though I *don't*. Every now and then I do, but not on the regular like I was every day—wake up out of bed and roll over and the cup would already be there and I'd be drinkin' it!

Do you think that's still the case with a lot of people? Are a lot of people you know still hitting it pretty hard?

Hell yeah! Hell yeah. No question. No doubt in my mind. Only reason why a lot of people aren't is because it's harder to get, and it's so much more expensive. And a different company makes it now, so it tastes a little bit different.

Is that right?

Yeah, other than that, man, shit, there's no doubt in my mind *everybody* would be doin' it just as much. Only reason—everybody I know who stopped only stopped because they can't afford it anymore, or there's too much hassle, or it don't taste—something like that. It's not … and there's only a *few* that don't drink it for like the health, beneficial reasons, like, you know, because it makes you lazy and it fucks up your health and that kinda shit. There's only a *small* few. And man, the people who stop, it's just because it *costs* too much. They can't afford it, or it's harder to get, or … you know, shit like that.

The repercussions are a lot greater now, too.

Yeah—oh hell yeah. Hell yeah. Shit, especially if you get caught with some of it? Like with the police, shit …

It's a felony, isn't it?

Yeah, because it's a C-2 level street, the penalty is greater than if you get caught with cocaine. It's the same as if you get caught with heroin. So shit … man, that's crazy.

You went to Iraq in 2007.

Yeah.

And Afghanistan in the same trip?

Nah, I went to Iraq and Kuwait, and then went back again the same year and then back again the next year, and then to Afghanistan after that. I went four times total, and then actually next week I'm going again. I'm actually goin' to Africa and Kuwait.

Are you gonna perform in Africa?

Yeah, I'm doin' five shows—I don't know where. I'm goin' to some other countries, too, but they didn't tell me 'cause the places I'm goin' this time is all super-classified like … people don't even know there's bases there, so I'm not allowed to talk about—after I went, I'm not allowed to say where I went, and they won't even tell me where I'm goin' until I get there.

So it's all military stuff, all the shows that you're playing.

Yeah, they're all military.

When you went over there, what was the biggest eye opener for you? The thing that you found that people misunderstood the most about what was going on over there?

I don't know man, it just … goin' over there, there was *so* many people from Texas. They told a statistic that 80 percent of the people over there were either *from* Texas or stationed in Texas. I don't know if that's still true today, but when I went there, people had Texas flags, they were holdin' them up. Texas tattoos, Texas shirts … they were pullin' out Texas—Cowboys jerseys, Texans jerseys, Oilers stuff. Like lookin' at little things that reminded them of home, things like that. And there were people that ranged in ages from 18 to in their 40s and 50s, and probably older than that. So there was like a—it was like a whole different world. Like, the military world is a different world than the civilian world. And it takes a hell of a person to do that, *and* to—the people that have wives and husbands, it takes a hell of a spouse to support them, too, because your spouse is gone for so long. Shit, it's hard to do shit on your own when your spouse is gone, because you miss them, you stress about them. You have needs, you have emotional needs, you have also physical needs, but shit... it's just hard to not be there because you feel alone when they're gone. I was gone—you know, every trip I'm gone is about two weeks, a week and a half... I miss my family like a *mother*fucker. Shit, and these people are gone—some of these people are gone six, eight months, a year. There was a dude over there, he was gone for *two years*. He was only supposed to be gone six months—he was over there for two years. And he was supposed to come home. He had a child at home he had *never* seen. He was supposed to come home, and he had just got the notice that he was gonna be—that he was needed for another six months. And I think some of it is... they wanna come home—by all means, they wanna come home—but it's a recession. It's hard to find jobs, and when you get stayed like that, when they make you stay for another six months, a lot of these people are gettin' pay raises, pay bumps, they might get—some of them are gettin' promoted in their ranks... so it's like shit, as much as you wanna go home, you have to sacrifice it because it's really—you *can't* go home, 'cause the opportunity to stay there is... you know, the opportunity you have is... man, it's a hell of an opportunity to get that pay bump, and all that extra stuff that come along with it.

My brother has been over there multiple times, and the more dangerous the situation you're in, the more you get paid... there's an incentive.

Especially—like when we went over there, Bush was still president. So, it was a... man, the country was kinda... I wouldn't even say it was *torn*, it was just all anti—it seemed like it was a lot, not all, but a majority of the country, especially the younger generation, was anti-war. "We don't need to be over there, we're fightin' somebody else's war..." You know, people hated Bush. I'm from Texas, so I didn't really—I don't know if it's that Texas pride where you kinda support people from Texas, even though I didn't all the way like Bush. But I also feel like, "Damn, he's from Texas," so I closed my mind to the negativity because I didn't wanna believe it. You know what I'm sayin'? And then as I started lookin', watchin' all the documentaries like *Loose Change*, *Zeitgeist* and all that kind of shit, it made me be like, "Damn, man, you know what? Damn! What the hell we got goin' on over here?" But when you go over there, like to do the USO trips, you can't talk about *none* of that shit. I asked people because people are open, and *they* want to talk about it. Some people *wanna* talk about certain things, but shit, they ain't never *seen* Bush. They just over there doin' they job, you know what I'm sayin'? And a lot of them would be like, "Man, if Bush cancels the war, that means we goin' home and we out a job." So it was a different type of perception from a lot of the people over there. But, you know, our generation—shit, our generation is, "Ah, man, we're fightin' somebody else's war. It's bullshit," all that kind of stuff. So, I don't know, man, it was wild goin' over there just to experience that in the middle of all of that goin' on. And you see, too, that these people have families just like I do. The same age as me. They're *younger* than me. Some of them are *older* than me, but I don't know, man, they live in—it's a different type of world that they live in.

You mentioned, kind of dipped in there for a second talking about Loose Change *and kind of venturing over into conspiracy theory territory, and that's a broad term that's used to blanket that, but it really is more the idea of questioning the government and questioning the foundations of what we've always believed. How far do you lean in that direction? I know that the belief in the Illuminati is very, very widespread throughout the rap community in Houston. Is that the same for you?*

Man, I think that it's so hard, man, because there's a lot of loony people out there that, if you question the government, people group you in with them. And it shouldn't be like that, because there's some crazy people out there who believe some crazy things, but some of those things they believe are true. And there's some general things that are true, too, but people—like especially some of the media outlets—will perceive ... they'll perceive people and they'll paint a picture of people that question the government as, "Aw, he's a conspiracy theorist, he's a crazy, he's loony." But that's not the case at all. It's just that we're questioning our government, and that's what we're *supposed* to do as a *people*. We're not supposed to just accept what people tell us. We're not just supposed to accept that ... what they tell us and what they say, because a lot of times, you know, all the smoke screens that they give off is *bullshit*. And if we just accept it ... they're not *here*, *they* shouldn't have the power. You know, it's *of* the people, *by* the people, *for* the people. So, you know, it's *our* government. They're supposed to be serving *us*. We're not supposed to serve *them*, you know what I'm sayin'? And too many times it becomes ... they just ... since they're in power, and people feel power*less*, we just accept it. We accept what they tell us and what they do, and we feel like there's nothing we can do about it. And if we ask questions, people get blackballed, they lose their jobs, they get—people look at 'em like they're crazy. You know, people look at you like you're loony. So I don't know, man. But I love all that, all the conspiracy theory—you know, like you said, it's a broad term, but I love all those documentaries. All the documentaries, man. I love documentaries. Because it's *mind*-blowing, and you don't even ... in some of them, you don't know if it's true or if it's not but it just shows a *completely* different side of the story, a completely different perspective than what you see when you turn the news on. When you turn on the news, no matter what news outlet you watch, it's gonna be the *same* thing. It's gonna be the same story. It's like, you know ... and this is just tellin' it from a *whole* different perspective.

You went to Africa before, for the Bling'd *documentary.*

Yeah, yeah. Man, that was wild, too.

Tell me about that.

Well we ... this lady named Raquel, she put together this documentary, and basically, she just wanted to ... it was diamond mines, and the diamond conflict, the war that had went on from 1991 and ended in 2001. And Kanye West's song "Diamonds from Sierra Leone," "diamonds are forever," that really just opened up a lot of people to asking about, you know, "What is this?" It just kind of familiarized people with what was goin' on. Because people didn't know. *I* didn't know. I had no idea, no clue.

Yeah, it's crazy, man.

I had never even *heard* of Sierra Leone. You know, "Where the hell is that?" I never heard of that, but she got me, Raekwon, Tego Calderón, and we, just basically, three rappers—you know, Tego Calderón does Reggaeton, but he's a rapper, too, though. So three rappers from three different parts of the country—he's from Puerto Rico, and me from Texas and Raekwon from New York. So we had kinda three different perspectives, but still ... she just took us to the diamond ... to Sierra Leone. We went to the diamond mines. There's two different kind of diamond mines. There's the big, industrial diamond mine, kind of looks like a Fred Flintstone gravel pit, where they go to work. And then there's the one that's in the river, where they got kids out there naked or in they underwear. Even though just butt-ass naked, siftin' through muddy water, tryin' to find diamonds, getting paid a cup of rice a day to do that. Even if they find a diamond, all they get is a cup of rice. So it's just like ... it just shows that you know how people are bein'—it's modern day slavery because people bein' taken advantage of and they have no options, no opportunities, no ways to fight back. No ways to make a livin' for their family, no ways to make a change for they government. We go in there, we sat down with the vice president of the country, and the head council. So shit, picture it: You come over here and you sit with Joe Biden, and Hillary Clinton and all kind of other big name people, and we sittin' with them, and we're tryin' to ask questions, how we can help shed light on this and how we can help make a change and what can we do, and they're sittin' there tryin' to get us to invest and buy hotels and stuff like that. They didn't care. You know, they had nothing goin' on. It was wild. And then we went to this place—in the documentary we went to this one place—we went to a lot of different places, but one of the spots was right on the water where ... it was an open, outside market, and it was also the public city dump. There was just trash piled up. And right there, there was shackles ... it was like, where the wall was, it was all shackled up where ... from 200-plus years ago, where the slaves were shipped off from *there* to North Carolina. The shackles on the wall were still here. So it was just a haunting experience. It was just a real wild, haunting experience. And when we go through there, we have the UN as our security, and they were—I think they were Nigerian, or something like that, I'm not sure, I'm just bein' real broad about it, but I think they were Nigerian, but they were—wherever they were from had some kind of beef, like some tribal beef or somethin', shit goin' on with the Sierra Leone people. So, since they're the security and they're the UN Police, they was in there bogartin', pushin' people around, bein' rude, pushin' people down, cussin' people out. And it's like, "Damn, man, when you come through like *that,* naturally the people there are gonna hate *us,* because they're ..." You know? And I was *embarrassed.* I was feelin' bad, like, "Damn, man, you can't be doin' that, man." It's just like if I have a concert somewhere and my security guards, like I go somewhere and I got fans and my security is pushin' people around, bullyin' people, it's just gonna make the fans be like, "Man, well *fuck* Paul Wall." It's just how it was, and we were over there and there was some ... there was some young Sierra Leone thugs that was there that just kind of got fed up, wasn't takin' it no more, and one of 'em kept tryin' to talk, man. And everybody, they got so spooked, and they got the hell up outta there. But he just wanted to *talk.* He wanted somebody to *listen* to him. And nobody would listen to him. Everybody was kinda scared. And I just went up to him, gave him a hug, like, "What's up, bro? I feel your pain. I don't know what you goin' through, 'cause I ain't *from* here, but shit, I feel your pain, you know what I'm sayin'? It's fucked up." And he was like, "Man, it's fucked up, man. We ain't got no government, no jobs, no opportunities," was basically what he was sayin'. But it just reminded me of one of the stories in the Bible, where there was a man on the side of the road and everybody passed him by and nobody would stop to talk to him. And then Jesus stopped and talked to him, and blessed him ... or something along that line ... I don't remember the story, it just reminded me of one of the stories in the Bible. And it made me wanna *talk* to him, 'cause I was like, "Damn, man, why is everybody runnin' away?" 'Cause the guns are *banned* from the country, so you can't have no guns in the whole country. So I didn't feel threatened, like my life—I didn't feel like threatened. Like what's the worst he can do? Whoop my ass? I can fight pretty good, it's all right, shit ... I don't know. I thought I was straight, you know what I'm sayin', so I wasn't like afraid. "What's up?" But it was just a wild experience, man, the whole time over there, and the whole thing really was just to *use* us to draw attention to the whole conflict that was goin' on and everything, spread and raise awareness to that. Because there's something called the Kimberley Process, where diamonds are found and they get registered through the Kimberley Process, and if they don't—see, some people don't do that. Some stores buy their diamonds not from the—they aren't registered through the Kimberley Process, but it's just to help encourage people to wanna buy ... to ask questions. You know, "Is this certified? This isn't a blood diamond, is it?" It's to ensure that the diamonds aren't illegally smuggled or traded. Because that's what was goin' on. People would—when the rebels took over, they took over the diamond mines, and were tradin' the diamonds for guns, or trading the diamonds for drugs that they used to—on the child soldiers to take over to not train but ... influence their minds ...

Assimilate.

Yeah, yeah, there you go. Man, shit, so the diamonds—it's a very valuable commodity, and what we look at is, we wear diamonds for show, like a status of success. You know, you got diamonds, shit—this is a diamond ring, it signifies that you got married. The bigger the diamond, the more your husband loves you. That's how some women feel. Or the bigger the diamond, the more money you got. Or just ... as a rapper, shit, if you got diamonds around your neck, that means you ain't broke. So if you ain't broke, shit, you got something goin' on. But if you walkin' around here lookin' broke, then people—it don't matter what your music sounds like, people gonna be, "Man, look at the way he look, how he lookin'. He look broke." In rap, image is everything. Shit, if you look broke, then people think you broke.

It really turned stuff around, though, for you and [business partner TV Johnny]. You changed your distributors and you kind of changed your approach.

Yeah, and shit, that's why I was like, "I gotta bring Johnny," 'cause Johnny run everything. I'm just like the promoter. I'm just like the face of the company. I don't know none of that other shit in the background, all the ... man, I don't handle none of that paperwork or none of that office, administrative ... I don't know none of that shit. Johnny handles all that. So it was like man, Johnny has to come. So he could see it too. So he could feel the same feelings I'm having, see the same things I'm seeing. That's a once in a lifetime opportunity, anyway, to go to Africa—how many people get to go to Africa? Yeah, so, immediately, the day we came back, we fired our diamond distributor, our diamond wholesaler, hired somebody else that was abiding by the Kimberley Process—not to say that the diamonds we were selling before were blood diamonds or conflict diamonds ...

But you wanted to be sure.

Yeah, we wanted to be sure, and we wanted to be able to ... you know, it's just like, "How can I tell someone to vote if I'm not votin'?"

Do you feel like it's brought awareness? Just speaking in hip-hop terms, really, with the materialism and everything. Do you think it's opened a lot of eyes?

Nah. It did when it came out. You know, it did at the time, but not really. The people that are buyin' the jewelry, they don't give a damn. They want the cheapest diamonds they can find. They don't care where it came from. They just wanna look good. Honestly. 'Cause, shit, honestly—somebody from Fifth Ward who wants a diamond grill—man, you think they give a damn where the diamonds came from? About the diamond conflict? Hell no! They just wanna look good. They wanna good lookin' grill, and they ain't tryin' to spend extra money for anything. But the benefit of it is, shit—it's not like a diamond is Kimberley-certified, that it costs more, 'cause it doesn't. It costs the same thing. It's just a motivatin' force to get the jewelry stores to subscribe to the Kimberley Process. But I don't think the actual general public, the general consumer, don't give a damn. There's some people that care about it, like, "Oh, those are blood diamonds," this and that, but them people don't even buy diamonds. Those people don't buy diamonds anyway, the people that care. Because some people will be like, "Oh, that's why I don't wear diamonds, that's why I only wear this and that." See, they not even buyin' diamonds, so it don't even matter.

Right, they're not in the market.

They're not even in the market. The people that are buyin' diamonds and buyin' jewelry? Man, they wouldn't give a damn, 'cause they have their own family members who lost their lives. They livin' in their own modern day slavery, where they don't have opportunities, and all they can do, all they feel like they can do is sell dope or hustle or doin' those type of things. So, they don't care what's goin' on in Africa. Man, a lot of these people that buy diamonds never even left their neighborhood except for once in their life to go downtown to go to court! So they never even went to the other side of town, so they really ... you know, as much as they ... maybe in the back of their head might care what's goin' on in Africa, a lot of these people don't give a damn because they got their own problems goin' on. And then the recession came. When the recession came, shit ... people wanted to look good, wanted to feel good, and how you feel has a lot to do with how you look. Not 100 percent, but it has a lot to do with it. When you look good, you feel good. Not 100 percent, but shit ... if you look bad ...

It reflects.

Yeah, it reflects on how you feel.

That was gonna be kind of the next direction I was going to go, talking about materialism and all of that. Do you feel like the recession hit hip-hop in any way that affected it for the long term?

It definitely changed it. Definitely changed it. It definitely changed a lot of things. It also gave people an excuse to not spend money on jewelry. Because a lot of people couldn't afford jewelry, but they were ... you know, it's all about image, so people would do what they had to do. A lot of people were buyin' fake jewelry, people were borrowing jewelry, or had their little starter jewelry kits. Like the baller on a budget jewelry, 'cause they couldn't afford the real thing. Then the recession hit, and you had people like Diddy, other people sayin' they don't wanna wear jewelry 'cause they don't wanna be shittin' on everybody, makin' people feel bad 'cause they got money and they don't. But I don't know, I always look at it from a different perspective, 'cause I was always motivated when I saw somebody shinin'. When I see somebody lookin' good driving a Bentley, with a bunch of diamonds and chains around their neck, that makes me wanna work even harder so that I can get it. You know, like as inspiration, to make me wanna work harder. So I just ... I never toned down on it. I never wanted to tone down on it because I wanted to inspire other people that, "Shit—yeah, it's a recession, and I'm still lookin' like this, so that means you can look like this, too." But I don't know, man, I think it gave a lot of people an excuse—not that Diddy didn't have money or couldn't afford the jewelry by any means—but a lot of people saw what he did, and was like, "Oh, thank god. Now ... okay, yeah, now I'm not gonna wear jewelry either." When really, at the end of the day, they just couldn't afford it, or ... not for the same reasons why he stopped wearin' his jewelry. 'Cause shit, I bet he got 1,000 Rolexes, Patek Philippe, Franck Muller, any watch you can name, I'm sure he got it!

You mentioned Fifth Ward a minute ago. When you were coming up and learning about what was going on in Houston ... South Park, Third Ward, Fifth Ward, were those kind of mythical places to you?

Definitely South Park was. Not really Fifth Ward because it was around my ... you know, it wasn't too far from where I live. But South Park—the Southside was kind of like a legendary place, like mythical place. Like a fantasy world, because it was so far away. And so many people in my neighborhood, growing up, had never ever been to this other side of town. Never even left their neighborhood. And still to this day haven't! Except to go to jail. So ... and I forget that. You forget that sometimes, because I've traveled the world—man, I'm goin' to Africa next week, shit ... but there's people that I know that I grew up with my whole life who've never even been to the other side of town. And if you've never been to the other side of town, then how can you, in your mind, strive to go worldwide? How can you, in your mind, believe that, "I can make it worldwide and I can go to Paris, Italy, wherever I wanna go in the whole world," you know what I'm sayin'? And I think it's sad that it's like that, because people get stuck in the neighborhood mind frame, and they accept it. My mom, she marched with the Freedom Fighters and all kind of stuff like that. She did sit-ins and protests. She traveled the world, like she lived in Jerusalem, Germany, so she would always tell me stories of these different places, and me ... I don't know ... I always loved Indiana Jones, like those type of movies, because I always wanted to see something different. It just was exciting to me. My wife always calls me the "Crocodile Hunter of Hip-Hop," because I always be doin' crazy shit like goin' to Afghanistan. I was in Afghanistan the deadliest month in the history of the war for American soldiers. I was over there that month. So shit, she always calls me the "Crocodile Hunter of Hip-Hop," where I be doin' this crazy shit. And I'm not like an adrenaline junkie at all, man. I'm scared of heights, man. I can't ski or snow ski or none of that. I mean ski or water ski, none of that. Man, I'm not an adrenaline junkie, it's just that I don't know, I like those adventurous type of things, and shit, as a rapper, comin' from where I come, who woulda thought that I could have done it? But I feel like shit, if I can do it, they can do it, too. But these fools have never even left the neighborhood. So, growing up, I would go to Astroworld, you know, I had a grandmother that lived in Meyerland, so when I'd go over there sometimes, it'd be like, "Damn, I can't believe I'm over there on the Southside." One of my best friends, he went to ... I can't remember the high school ...

Jones? Sterling?

Nah, nah ... it was off of 288 and Yellowstone. 288 and OST right there. It's like ... not HSPVA, but ... man, what is that high school? It's like a magnet school, too. Like a performin' school, some shit ... gonna text my homeboy and ask him right now. So yeah, we go there, we like, "Damn, man, how far are we from ... where the Screw shop at, man?" "Where this and that at, man? Let's go to that South Park—where's Herschelwood at?" All that kind of stuff. And it was funny growing up, you know, me and my homeboy were undercover Screwheads. Because livin' on the Northside, shit ... they were talkin' shit, dissin' the Northside. But as much as we were like Northside soldiers, we loved ... we would get in fights. We would always go to Club Oasis, Jamaica Jamaica, all the time, and we would wear Northside shirts ... all kind of stuff, get in fights all the time. But at the same time, we just loved the Screw music. We loved DJ Screw, Keke, Fat Pat. They were my favorite rappers. So it just ... one of my homeboys, I remember ... my homeboy was playin' some Screw tape where they were sayin' something about the Northside on it, and I was just listenin' from a fan, like, "Damn, man, he goin' off!" But my homeboy was like, "Man, get that shit out my car!" He threw it out the window, "Man, that shit gonna get no play in my car!" He was gettin' pissed. So we were undercover Screwheads. Needless to say, when Slim Thug and E.S.G. did "Braids 'N Fades," man, we were a lil' happy that, "Okay, now the beef is over." We would always joke around, "Okay, now the beef is over, we can listen to Screw in public now."

If you had to sum that beef up for somebody who kind of knew some of the artists involved [with Houston's Northside/Southside beef in the 1990s], what would you tell them?

It was the equivalent to gang violence. You know, because even on the Northside, there was a lot of Northside beef where, you know, Acres Homes and Fifth Ward would always get into it at Chocolate Town. All my homeboys from Acres Homes would get into it. All my homeboys from Fifth Ward ... well, not necessarily my homeboys ... but people from Acres Homes and Fifth Ward would always get into it at Chocolate Town. Always be fightin', people getting shot, losin' they life over that, and then, so ... the Southside against the Northside was more like ... it was like straight up gang violence. It was just exactly what it was. Bloods versus Crips. Or the perception of Bloods versus Crips, because really, Bloods versus Crips ... shit, there's just as many Bloods versus Bloods and Crips versus Crips, you know, but just the general perception of Blood versus Crip, that's what it was.

Part of it because of the car colors.

Yeah, yeah. That exactly. So yeah, man ... I think that kind of sums it up right there. It's like Bloods versus Crips. 'Cause there really wasn't—growin' up there wasn't Bloods versus Crips ... [*receives text message*] Oh, my homeboy went to High School for Health Profession. High School for Health Professions, it's right off of 288 near Yellowstone.

Oh okay.

DeBakey High School for Health Professions. So I would always play basketball—they didn't have a basketball team, but we would always go up there and ... ah, man, that shit was funner than a motherfucker, and he would always put me on all the shit goin' on. Because since he went to a high school on the Southside, but he was *from* Acres Homes. So it was ... you know, he would always come back and tell us, "Man, this a new Screw tape," this and everything. He would always put us up on game, what was goin' on. And it was kinda wild, because me bein' a real big Screw fan and Screwhead, but bein' from the Northside, it's like damn—you can't really be a Screwhead from the Northside, because there was beef goin' on. So shit, you would get talked about, you would get made fun of, people would wanna fight you, all kinda shit like that if you was jammin' that. But it was fucked up, because it was like, "What the fuck? What are we supposed to listen to if we can't listen to that?" DJ Screw became a huge part of the Houston culture and the Texas culture in general, the Houston music scene and the culture in general, but shit ... bein' from the Northside, it was like damn near treason to be listenin' to Screw, because there was the beef goin' on. So, when Michael Watts came out, man it was like it filled a void that a lot of people had ... it filled a void that was there. A lot of people wanted to jam that style of music, but couldn't. And this gave artists an avenue to rap on tapes and it gave fans an avenue to listen to it. But, you know, the Southside perspective was always, "Ah, that's some fake Screw." And there was a lot of people on the Northside that felt like that, too, for a long time. But shit, it just gave a lot of people like myself, who was a fan of it, something to hold on to that was like something that was our *own*, like the Northside's. This was ... Michael Watts was the Northside avenue for us to jam that type of music, and rap on tapes, listen to artists who were shoutin' out our neighborhoods, 'cause I ain't never hear no artists on Screw tapes talk about Acres Homes or Fifth Ward or all that shit unless they were talkin' about, "I shot up Tidwell," or talkin' about, "Fuck the Northside." That was the only time *I* heard it. There was never anything *good* goin' on.

Well it was easy to dismiss Watts as being like a fake Screw, but he's such a different thing when you really start to listen to him. It's such a totally different take on that. The music is slow but it's got a totally different vibe than Screw.

And he was never tryin' to be DJ Screw. He was never trying to be the Northside DJ Screw. He was just always tryin' to be Michael "5000" Watts. But that ... I mean, and even to this day, I'll see people on Twitter, like somebody says something about Screw and somebody will be like, "Oh, Screw wasn't a music, Screw was a man, that ain't Screw, there's only one Screw," this and that. "Screw was a man, not a style of music." There's a few people that feel like that, but I *completely* disagree. I feel like DJ Screw was so much more than just a man. He created a style of music, and DJ Screw still *is* the heart and soul of this Texas music scene. Not even just Houston, but the whole *state*. DJ Screw stands for so much more. DJ Screw is an iconic figure, and he's so much more than *just* a person. He's not just a DJ, but DJ Screw represents the whole culture, the whole lifestyle we live, and man, the music in *general*. Because he had that kind of effect on the *music*, and all of the Texas music is kinda grouped in as "Screw music," and I think—I think, man ... I'm *proud* of that. Some people would disagree, and some people feel like, "Man, Screw was a man, not a music," but I'm *proud* that what became—what started off as just a man doin' mixtapes became so huge, to where Black Eyed Peas are puttin' it in their music. 50 Cent, Ciara, any artist you can think of—Ludacris, all these artists are integrating this type style of music into their music sometimes, shit ... Justin Timberlake got a song with slowed down music! So, these are the biggest names in entertainment, and that's just, you see how far one man started. His legacy is *so* much more than just bein' just "DJ Screw." It's so much more than him bein' just a DJ, and him bein' a man. He's the—man, he's the heart and soul of the Texas music scene, Texas music culture in general. And it's not even just about the *music*. DJ Screw is more than just music. It's just the whole lifestyle of everything. Sippin' syrup, it goes hand in hand with Screw, with Screw music and DJ Screw. Shit, the slab culture is right there with DJ Screw. The whole lifestyle, the slowed-down, slow pace lifestyle, you know, just is all right there, and with Screw music and syrup, it's like ... I like to think of it like, you know, when you eat a steak, the steak's gonna be good, and the steak might be incredible, but when you drink a glass of wine, it just brings out the flavor. So, you know, that's kinda like with the syrup and shit. The Screw music is jammin', but when you got a big cup of purple stuff right there it just, it just brings out different flavors that you wouldn't have noticed if you didn't have that cup there, too. It just enhances it.

But part of that—and it is more than just the man, but a big part of it was who he was as a person, though, right? Especially when you see the way that he touched *people's lives. I mean people were really close to Screw... everybody felt like Screw was their best friend because that's the way he treated people...*

Oh yeah. And that leadership quality, of leadin' by example, of showin' love, is also a big part of, you know, just the Texas way. We show love. We don't hate. We show love. People get lost in that. They forget about that, and they feel like, "Oh, Screw showed me love, so he loved me more than you, because he didn't show you love." Well, Screw didn't show me love because he didn't know me. Maybe if I would have known him, I'm sure he woulda shown me love because I don't see how he couldn't have, because he showed every single other person that he ever *met* love. So just leadin' by example, just showin' love and not hatin' is something some people forget. But definitely, man, that "show love" mentality, man... and to see how many careers he started. Shit, I wouldn't be here. By *all* means I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for DJ Screw, and I wasn't *never* on a Screw tape! I wish I *was* on a Screw tape! Shit. I wish I had an opportunity to be on one.

Did you ever meet him?

Yeah I met him a few times.

Yeah?

Yeah I met him a few times. Matter of fact, one time I met him, I was promotin'. It was at Kappa Beach Party on the [Galveston] Seawall. I was passin' out flyers or somethin'. This was like in I think '97, maybe '98. It had to be '98 maybe. And I was passin'—I had a Swishahouse shirt on or somethin', and this was in the earliest days of Swishahouse. So I *seen* him, and I passed—I was like, "Oh, shit, there go DJ Screw!" And I gave him a flyer or somethin', and he was like, "Man, you with the Swishahouse?" I was like, "Yeah, my name's Paul Wall," this and that. He was like, "Man, where Michael Watts at, man? Tell him he need to call me, man. Tell him he need to call me *right* now, man. Or whenever he—as soon as you see him, tell him he need to call me, 'cause we need some—we need to talk about somethin'." I was like, "What's goin' on?" He was like, "Man, tell him quit..." What happened was, kids—and people were doin' this to Swishahouse, too—kids were callin', or people were callin' up to the Screw shop sayin', "Yeah, this Michael Watts—fuck y'all!" This and that. "This is Michael Watts." And people would *also* call Michael Watts! "Man, this DJ Screw, man—fuck y'all!" So *he* thought—I guess he was under the assumption that Watts was doin' that! But I was like, "Nah, man, ain't no way." 'Cause that ain't Watts's character, either. Watts is not like that at all. Watts the same way. He wants to—he shows love to people. He has the same—and I think—and Watts has told me on a few occasions that they were friends, him and DJ Screw were friends. So, I'm sure a lot of DJ Screw, his mentality of showin' love and not hate, I'm sure that rubbed off on Watts, to make Watts show love to so many people. But it's crazy to see how things can escalate, just people playin' games and doin' silly, stupid shit. That can help escalate. Because I'm sure there was a lot of people—because *DJ Screw* thought it was Watts callin' him—I'm sure there was a lot of other people felt that, too! When it wasn't Watts, it wasn't anybody who represented Watts in any way. But they—some people, they see that and they hear that and they get it confused, they get it misconstrued and they feel like it's Watts doin' that or it's people from Swishahouse doin' that so naturally, they get on the attack and wanna attack back! It's sad that it's like that. It's a part of the—it's *amusing*, because it's like, "Aw, man, that's funny—there's some crazy lil' shit goin' on." But man, it's... thank God it didn't escalate farther than it did, especially in the midst of the East Coast/West Coast shit, you know what I'm sayin'? People was ready to... shit, people were ready to die and people were ready to *kill* for they neighborhood. So shit, it's a blessing that it didn't escalate further than it did.

Well the East Coast/West Coast thing is kind of what inspired/touched it off in Houston anyway, right?

Yeah. Oh yeah, because a lot of us in Texas felt like we were bein' overlooked. This was all pre-internet, so shit... people still thought people in Texas rode on horses... and shit, my uncle, he have a trail ride every year! But we don't ride on horses to go to our job.

And I know just as many people in California ride on horses. I know more people in California got horses than I do in Texas! But the perception back then was everybody in Texas is a hick, cowboy, you know, we slow, we don't know nothin'... 'cause we got a country slang—we got a country twang to our voice. We talk with different slang, so since they don't understand what we say, we're dumb and ignorant. But really, they got people from different—people from every city and state have their own slang, their own twang and their own little culture that makes them their own. And instead of getting to understand it, people just wrote it off. It was all East Coast/West Coast, and that just motivated us in Texas—and this is in the Dirty South in general—to wanna just... shit, come up and work harder 'cause we felt like we weren't gettin' our just due. I'm sayin' "we," but they were doin' that long before me. The roads were paved way before me.

And now the Texas slang, the Texas vernacular is global. It's all over the place.

Hell yeah! People are sayin' "what it do," sayin' "I'm throwed," stuff like that. Shit... syrup. Look how big syrup is! Man, syrup is so huge in Atlanta right now, in Florida—oh my God, it's incredible!

"Awready."

Yeah! "Awready," shit... everything, man, it's just amazing to see that. And some people get upset behind that. Some people feel like, "Aw, they stealin' our culture." And they have every right to feel that way, but me, as a fan of the culture, and me as someone who always was a champion for the underdog, and a champion for our culture, fightin' for it, shit... I'm proud of that. When Usher got a song sayin' he "throwed," and Drake talkin' about bein' throwed and stuff like that, shit... Lil' Wayne, Drake... the two biggest rappers right now. Sippin' syrup, talkin' about sippin' syrup, everywhere they go they got two white cups. Talkin' about Screw. Shit, Drake got a song with E.S.G. with "Swangin' & Bangin'" on it! Shit—1992 was when it came out! 1992, 1993, so this is almost 20 years later.

That's crazy.

So as a fan of that, man, that's amazin', and it just puts a smile on my face to see that people are finally gettin' their just due and just recognition that they deserve, who paved the way for me and who also paved the way for others. It's incredible to see that. I'm happy to... but there's a lot of people that feel the exact opposite. They're mad, upset, "Man, they stealin' our culture, they stealin' this and that." You know, they have every right to feel that way if that's how they feel, it's just... they're not right and I'm wrong or I'm right and they wrong. It's just two different opinions and two different ways to look at it.

Well, you know, part of it, though, in Houston in particular—the history really gets handed down. People talk about the history and the artists in Houston who have really laid the groundwork. Those stories still get passed down. Look at The Peoples Champ*... for some people, when they listen to that, it's like a table of contents. It brought a lot of things to light. That's part of it, is that there was this entire vernacular, this entire history. When it blew up, people were able to learn about that stuff.*

And you know what? The whole theme of that album was that: "They Don't Know." The song "They Don't Know" was... the whole theme of the album was: People don't know about our culture. Well, let me explain it. Let me talk about it, and let me promote it, and let me, you know, explain the best I can... especially with the visuals, the videos and stuff. And then gettin' other artists, and me having that same "show love" mentality, and bein' a fan just of hip-hop in general, when I had the opportunities to work with other mainstream artists or other top of the game artists, man, I tried to seize every one of those opportunities and do songs with these people. Because, for one, it's not just me doin' a song with them. I try to make it be them doing a song with *Houston*. Just to help put our city and our state on the map, and keep it—not that it wasn't on the map already, but just put it in the forefront, put it in the light, and just to show that man, we're not just some hicks that are ignorant and dumb and don't know what we talkin' about down here. You know, we might talk a little different. We might talk a little slower, but that don't mean we're dumb and that don't mean we have ... you know, there's not real lyricists down here. That don't mean we don't have talent. That don't mean the music ain't good, that we don't have a live culture.

What do you think it would be like if Screw had lived, if he were alive today?

Man, it's hard to say. I think ... I don't think it would be the same necessarily. Same with Pimp C. When Pimp C went to jail, that gave us something to rally behind. It gave us a rally cry. You know, he was our hero ... Oh! This is what I was going to tell you: One time I was doin' an interview in New York, on Hot 97, and we were talkin' about things and I said, you know, "Hey, I know it's a little different because you're from the mecca of hip-hop, you know, you're from the home and the origination where it all started, but I'm not from here. I'm from Houston. And I'm from a different generation than a lot of older people. I'm from a whole different generation than the founders of hip-hop, and I'm from a different generation than the generation after that. My old school isn't KRS-One. It isn't Afrika Bambaataa, and Kool Herc. And those are heroes and legends, but my old school growin' up, the people who influenced me, who I listened to who inspired me to want to rap were DJ Screw, Fat Pat, Lil' Keke." People don't understand that, since they're not from where we're from. They don't understand how a lot of that music didn't trickle down here. Man, everything I know about KRS-One and Afrika Bambaataa and Kool Herc, I learned after I had fell in love with hip-hop from listening to Screw tapes. And that offends a lot of people. Sayin' that in general that offends a lot of people, but shit, man ... the culture ... they weren't talkin' in the language that I spoke. Lil' Keke and Fat Pat and UGK were talkin' in the language that I spoke. You know, they were talkin' about things that I saw, they were talkin' with slang, with the same slang that I spoke, and that I grew up around. So shit, they influenced me a lot more and a lot different. That's what made me fall in love with hip-hop, not the originators of hip-hop. I mean, that offends a lot of people. People get upset behind that. There's a lot of people that feel that way. Shit, my old school was somethin' different. The people that made me fall in love with hip-hop was different, you know?

(2011)

Selected Listening

Houston's rap artists are prolific, and have produced an extensive library of music over the last three decades. Everyone's list of favorite songs in that library would differ, so this is by no means a "greatest hits." Instead, it is a broad sampling of the collaborative work of Houston artists from over the years that hopefully encourages you to dig deeper in the crates.

20-2-Life ft. PSK-13 "Backstreets," (DJ Screw mix) from *Bigtyme Recordz Vol II: All Screwed Up* (1995)
4 Deep "Rollin' 4 Deep," from *What's Really Goin' On* (1994)
5th Ward Boyz "Situations," from *Rated G* (1995)
ABN (Z-Ro, Trae tha Truth) ft. Hawk "Down In Texas," from *It Is What It Is* (2008)
Al-D "Lost In Tha Hood," from *Home Of The Free* (1995)
BAM ft. Fakkulty "Street Symphony," from *A Rough Nigga'z Bible Vol. II Hell On Earth* (2000)
Beltway 8 Boyz "Rollin Down Slow," from *Built For War* (2002)
Big 50 "Smoke-N-Maintain," from *4-A-Gee* (1997)
Big Love "Pimp," from *Representin' Real* (1997)
Big Mello "Funkwichamind," from *Wegonefunkwichamind* (1994)
Big Mike "World Of Mind," from *Somethin' Serious* (1994)
Big Moe ft. Hawk, Lil' O "Get Back," from *City of Syrup* (2000)
Big Pokey ft. Chris Ward "Right Now," from *Da Sky's Da Limit* (2002)
Big Ron "How You Want It," from *Various Artists: Eating Off The Streets Vol. 2* (2005)
Billy Cook ft. Trae tha Truth "That Shit Gone Change," from *The Truth* (2006)
Blac Monks (Mr. 3-2, Da, Awol) "Buddah Nature," from *Secrets Of The Hidden Temple* (1995)
Black Mike ft. B-1 "Lord Please," from *Haven't You Heard?* (2004)
Born 2wice ft. B-Fine, Ricardo Royal a.k.a. Rick Royal "Child 4 Freestyle," from 12" (1990)
Botany Boyz "Playa Hatin' Bustas," (DJ Screw mix) from *Chapter 148: Do U Feel Me* (1997)
Bun B ft. Pimp C, Z-Ro, Young Jeezy, Jay-Z "Get Throwed," from *Trill* (2005)
Bushwick Bill "Ever So Clear," from *Little Big Man* (1992)
Captain Jack "Jack It Up," from 12" single (1984)
Chamillionaire ft. Lil' Flip "Turn It Up," from *The Sound Of Revenge* (2005)
Chingo Bling "Like This N Like That," from *They Can't Deport Us All* (2007)

Choice "Payback," from *The Big Payback* (1990)

Cl'Che ft. Hawk "Can't Nobody," from *Clasyfyd Lady* (1998)

C.O.D. (K-Rino, Dope E.) "South Park," from *2nd Edition* (2011)

Convicts (Mr. 3-2, Big Mike) "Peter Man," from *Convicts* (1991)

Coota Bang & Archie Lee "Real Talk," from *Hood Theory* (2007)

Coughee Brothaz "Piece Of The Pie," from *Waitin' Our Turn* (2007)

Crime Boss ft. MJG "You Gotta Reap What You Didn't Sew," from 12" (1995)

Dat Boy Grace "Come Ride Wit A Playa," from *From Crumbs To Bricks* (1999)

Dead End Alliance ft. DJ Screw, Lil' Keke, Fat Pat, Mike-D, Kay-K, Hawk "Heart Of A Hustler," from *Screwed For Life* (1998)

Deep South Coalition ft. Murdoq a.k.a. Dope E. "Catch-A-Contact," from *Chambers Of Da South* (2000)

Def IV "School Boy Crush," from *Nice And Hard* (1988)

Den Den ft. Z-Ro, Wood "My Life," from *Chief Executive Hustler* (2002)

Devin The Dude "To Tha X-Treme," from *To Tha X-Treme* (2004)

DJ DMD ft. Fat Pat, Lil' Keke "25 Lighters," from 12" (1998)

DJ Screw ft. Big Moe, Bird, DeMo, Key-C, Yungstar, Big Pokey, Haircut Joe, K-Luv "June 27," from *Chapter 012: June 27* (1996)

E.S.G. "Swangin' & Bangin'," from *Ocean Of Funk* (1994)

Fakkulty (Kook, Lil' V, Malik) "Life On The Streets," from *Southern Hostility* (1996)

Fat Pat "No Glory," (DJ Screw mix) from *Since The Gray Tapes* (2005)

Fesu "Streets Of Greenspoint," from *The Game* (1998)

Gang Society "Dope Game," from *The Games Finest* (1998)

Ganxsta N-I-P ft. K-Rino, Point Blank, Dope E. "Rough Brothers From South Park," from *The South Park Psycho* (1992)

Geto Boys (Scarface, Willie D, Bushwick Bill) "Mind Playing Tricks," from *We Can't Be Stopped* (1991)

Ghetto Boys (Raheem, Sir Rap-A-Lot a.k.a. K-9, Sire Jukebox) ft. Lady C "Car Freak," from 12" (1987)

Glass ft. John Williams "Bedrok," from *Introducing Glass* (1983)

G.R.I.T. Boys ft. Hawk "Know What I Mean," single (2012)

Guerilla Maab (Trae tha Truth, Z-Ro, Dougie D) "Rise," from *Rise* (1999)

Hawk ft. Z-Ro "Diggin Tha South," from "Diggin Tha South"/ "They Scared" 12" (2002)

Herschelwood Hardheadz "Respect Da Game," from *A Million Dollar$ Later* (1998)

H.I.S.D. (Savvi, EQuality, Scottie Spitten, LDA Voice) "Space City Express," from *The Weakend* (2010)

Infamous Playa Family "Never Feel Such Pain," from *Focused On Ambitions Vol. 1* (1999)

Jazzie Redd "Top Secret," from "Top Secret" b/w "I Run This Town" 7" (1987)

Jefferson Ink "Girl You Turn Me On," from 12" (1983)

Justice Allah "What I'm Seeing," from *Justice Served* (2011)

Kaza (a.k.a. Monk from The Officials) "Dad," from *Various Artists: Eating Off The Streets Vol. 2* (2005)

Killa Kyleon ft. Big Pokey "Bullies & Swangas," single (2013)

Klondike Kat "Ghetto Baby," from *Mobbin' Muzik Melodies* (1997)

K-Otix "Move On," from "Long Time"/ "Move On" 12" (2004)

K-Rino ft. MC Wickett Crickett, A.C. Chill, Mafia Genie, Rhyme Felony "Overdose," from *Danger Zone* (1995)

Kyu Boi ft. Young K.E.W.E., K-Water, Mo Lew "Hush Haters," from *Thug Reunion* (2007)

The L.A. Rapper "MacGregor Park," from 7" (1985)

Lil' Flip ft. Lyfe Jennings "Ghetto Mindstate (Can't Get Away)," from *I Need Mine $$* (2005)

Lil Head ft. Paul Wall "It's Too Late," from *Tha 4'3" Giant* (2004)

Lil' Keke "South Side," from *Don't Mess Wit Texas* (1997)

Lil' O ft. Mr. 3-2, Big Moe, Hawk "Playa's Still Get Chose," from *Neva Lay Down Vol. 1* (2004)

Lil' Troy ft. Fat Pat, Yungstar, Lil' Will, Big T. "Wanna Be A Baller," from *Sittin' Fat Down South* (1999)

LOS of Screwed Up Click "I Don't Think So," from *Certified* (2012)

MC Wickett Crickett "Can I Hit It," from "Where U From"/"Can I Hit It" 12" (1996)

Mic Skills "Criminal," from *Defiant* (2009)

Mike Jones ft. Slim Thug, Paul Wall "Still Tippin'," from *Who Is Mike Jones?* (2005)

Mr. 3-2 "Comin Down," from *The Wicked Buddah Baby* (1996)

Murder One Ft. K-Rino, A.C. Chill, DBX "South Side Killa," from *Southern Foundation Vol. 1* (2004)

New Mafia "New Mafia," from *12"* (1990)

Odd Squad (Devin The Dude, Jugg Mugg, Rob Quest) "Smokin' Dat Weed," from *Fadanuf Fa Erybody!!* (1994)

O.G. Style "Catch 'Em Slippin," from *I Know How To Play 'Em* (1991)

Papa Reu ft. Lil' O "Shine," from *Xcuse Me!* (2000)

Paul Wall ft. Big Pokey "Sittin' Sideways," from *The Peoples Champ* (2005)

Pimp C ft. P.O.P., Lil' Keke "Knockin' Doorz Down," from *Pimpalation* (2006)

Point Blank "My Mind Went Blank" from *Prone To Bad Dreams* (1992)

Raheem "Dance Floor," from *The Vigilante* (1988)

Real Chill (K-Rino, Preppy J, G.T.) "Rockin' It," from 12" single (1986)

Ronnie Spencer "Early Morning," from *Dirty Third 2: Home Sweet Home Soundtrack* (2002)

Royal Flush "I Never Made 20," from *976-DOPE* (1991)

R.P. Cola ft. Mista Mookie "Too Much Lean In My Cup," from 12" (1999)

Savvi "Hueston Chronicles," from *Hueston Chronicles Fixtape* (2004)

Scarface "On My Block," from *The Fix* (2002)

Showtyme "Gangster Shit (Slowed & Throwed)," from *State 2 State* (2006)

S.L.A.B. "Catch Me In Tha Lot," from *The Anthem* (2005)

Slim Thug ft. UGK "Leanin'," from *Boss Of All Bosses* (2009)

South Park Mexican "Burn Us Alive," from *Time Is Money* (2000)

Southside Playaz (Mr. 3-2, Mike-D, Clay Doe) ft. Fat Pat "Swang Down," from *Street Game* (2000)

Street Military ft. Klondike Kat "Next Episode," from *Next Episode* (1995)

The Terrorists (Dope E., Egypt E) "That's My Motto," from *Detonate The Landmines* (2008)

Together Brothers (The ARE, Kay of The Foundation) "Y U Wanna," from 12" (2006)

Too Much Trouble "Wanted Dead Or Alive," from *Bringing Hell On Earth* (1992)

Top Dog ft. Klondike Kat "Feel Like Pimping," from *Slam Dunk'n Hoes* (2005)

Trae tha Truth ft. Hawk "Swang," from *Restless* (2006)

Trinity Garden Cartel "Don't Blame It On Da Music," from *Don't Blame It On Da Music* (1994)

UGK "3 In The Morning," from *Ridin' Dirty* (1996)

Willie D "5th Ward," from *Controversy* (1989)

Wood "Weekend," from *Against The Grain* (2000)

Woss Ness "Holes In They Trunk," from *2000 Bangin' Screw* (2000)

Wreckless Klan (Point Blank, PSK-13, Ice Lord) ft. Maré Jayne "Let's Ride," from *Blowin' Up Tha Scene* (1996)

Yungstar "Knocking Pictures Off Da Wall," from *Throwed Yung Playa* (1999)

Z-Ro "Mo City Don," from *Let The Truth Be Told* (2005)

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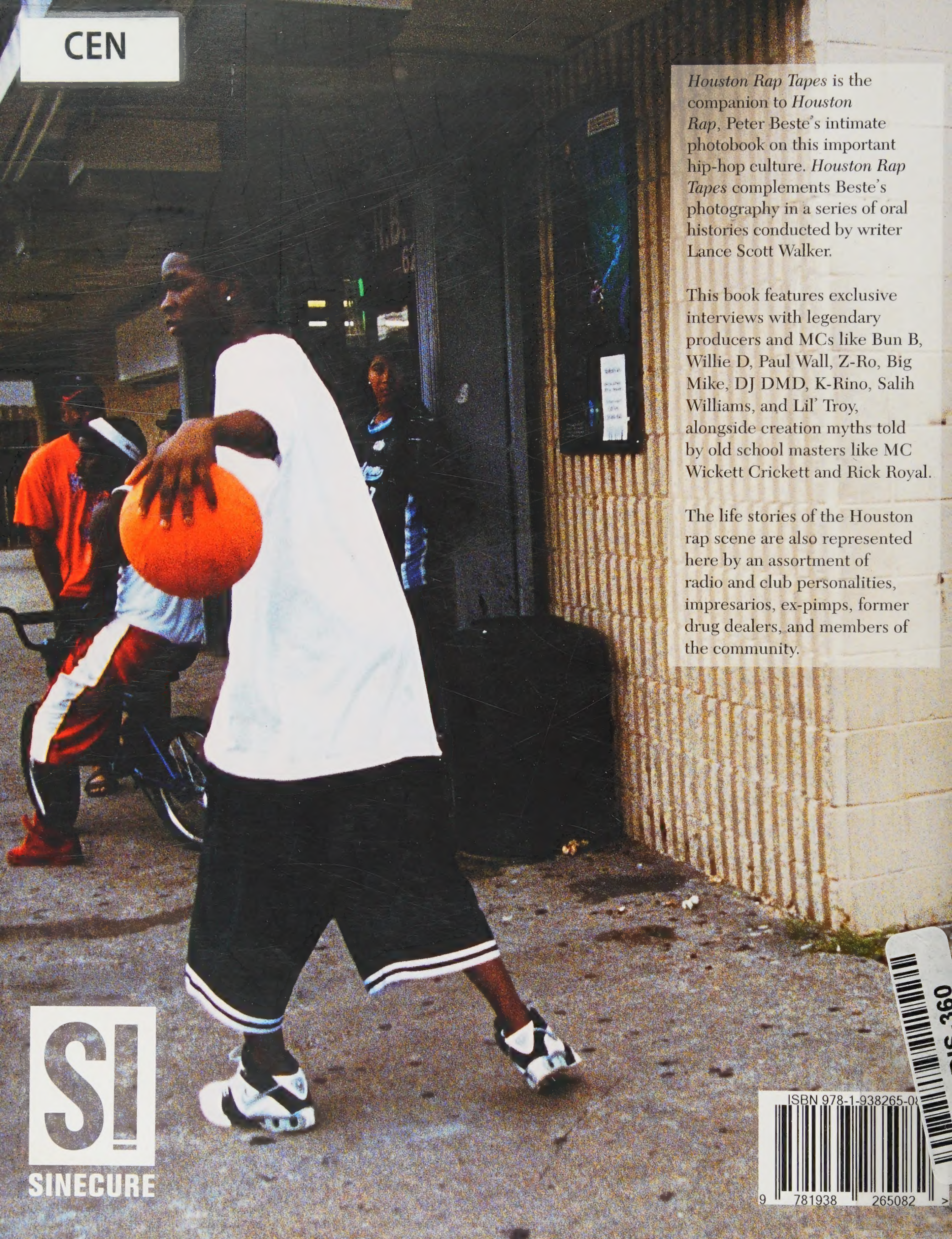

Houston Rap Tapes is the companion to *Houston Rap*, Peter Beste's intimate photobook on this important hip-hop culture. *Houston Rap Tapes* complements Beste's photography in a series of oral histories conducted by writer Lance Scott Walker.

This book features exclusive interviews with legendary producers and MCs like Bun B, Willie D, Paul Wall, Z-Ro, Big Mike, DJ DMD, K-Rino, Salih Williams, and Lil' Troy, alongside creation myths told by old school masters like MC Wickett Crickett and Rick Royal.

The life stories of the Houston rap scene are also represented here by an assortment of radio and club personalities, impresarios, ex-pimps, former drug dealers, and members of the community.

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